RETURNED TO 'NORMALITY'? ESTONIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS AFTER EU AND NATO ACCESSION

Kerstin Mahlapuu

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ABSTRACT

Estonian identity politics in the 1990s were firmly rooted in the narrative of 'returning to Europe' and breaking with the Soviet past – to become a 'normal' country again. This narrative underwent a significant change on successful entry to key international organisations such as the EU and NATO. This research is a qualitative in-depth investigation into the complex and multi-layered Estonian national identity constructions evident within Estonian society after it had had nearly a decade to 'settle into' this European 'normality'.

Estonia formally validated its 'return in Europe' in 2004, but how is 'Europeanness' conceptualised by the people on the ground? The thesis demonstrates that the economic crisis which hit Europe in 2008, and had an impact on the defining of 'Europeanness', encouraged a new binary of North vs South division in how Europe was perceived. Following interviews with 33 persons from different parts of Estonia, an emergent theme from the empirical findings was, that for many, Estonia was seen as embodying the 'true' neoliberal values associated with the understanding of 'Europe'. The same neoliberal paradigm was at play in helping to shape understandings of Russia, which also frame domestic interethnic relations to a degree. The latter has been the central focus of previous studies to which the current research offers a novel perspective.

Themes of security have not lost their relevance in relations with Russia but the pragmatic understanding of reconciling the economic necessity and the more national emotional element has become pertinent nearly a decade after officially 'returning to Europe'. Another key finding of this research shows a shift from the inter-war period to the early 1990s as a benchmark for Estonian identity-construction, which implies that at the time of conducting this study there was no longer a need to *return* to 'Europe'.

In addition to the limited research done on Estonian national identity since joining the EU and NATO, there has been minimal attention paid to a grassroots perspective on the issue. By taking a bottom-up perspective through in-depth interviewing and using an innovative visual methodology, this research makes a significant and timely contribution into understanding the 'normality' that had settled in Estonia after EU and NATO accession.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Kerstin Mahlapuu

Signature: 

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to bring forward a more complex, multi-layered picture of national identity construction in post-accession Estonia, with particular reference to the concept of 'normality' and its role within this process. It does this through an in-depth examination of perspectives from below nearly a decade after the country joined the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). By giving a fuller appreciation of outlooks in one of the relatively recent new member states, this thesis helps to illuminate questions that are crucial to the future of the EU, at a time when the Union has been placed under severe pressure by the economic crisis and the relationship with Russia, its policies and intentions towards neighbouring states, is a particular focus of international politics. The material collected in this thesis provides a rich basis for further consideration of these issues.

Estonia's geographical position as a border state between the European Union and the Russian Federation provides an interesting case for mapping the ideational and practical construction of nationhood and geopolitical belonging in the post-Soviet period. One of the main agendas for Estonia during the early transition period was to distance itself from anything Soviet/Russian and to 'return to the Western world' politically and economically. Belonging to its natural place in the 'West' again was supposed to re-establish a state of 'normality' from which Estonia had been forcefully removed with the Soviet occupation.

This thesis is theoretically guided by Barbara Misztal's (2001; 2015) use of the term 'normality' in social research. It builds upon and modifies Henry Hale's

(2008) ‘The Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of States and Nations in Eurasia and the World’ account of group formation in order to highlight the important role that constructions of ‘normality’ play in this process. The main premise for Hale’s approach to group formation (which also draws on Social Identity Theory) is that groups are constructed as a means for reducing uncertainty and navigating the social world. He states that identity is a set of points of personal reference people rely on to navigate the social world and groups are formed by having common relationships to points of reference. These common relationships provide the essential link between the top-down and the ground level. And the points of reference which can be deemed the common sense, taken for granted assumptions are the core for holding together the ‘imagined political community’ of the nation.

And this is how ‘normality’ is seen in this research – it is an ideational collection of ‘thicker’ or more meaningful points of reference related to perceptions of national identity that are shared by the people in Estonia. Hale’s approach to group formation provides a very useful theoretical basis for looking at ‘normality’ within national identity constructions in Estonia. It guides the study and provides a basic foundation as to how and why ‘normality’ is sought for and explains the relative stability and the feasibility of change within these ideational constructions.

As already mentioned in terms of gaining a better understanding of Estonian national identity, the thesis follows the social constructivist approach to explore these *constructions* within the wider perception of ‘normality’. National identity is addressed here as a facet of an ‘imagined political community’, as famously put forward by Benedict Anderson (1983). In this definition, a nation is a community socially constructed, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. In order to identify the Self as a community, there has to be something outside that community, an Other. As national identity should not be seen as something fixed but as something that is constantly ‘negotiated and renegotiated’ (Mole 2012: 3) within the constructivist paradigm, then the same applies to the process of Othering. The relational construction of identity derives from the idea that the delineation of a Self from an Other is an active and ongoing part of identity construction and that the Self and Other also merge into one another

(Neumann 1999: 35-36). Defining the boundaries of an 'imagined community' is therefore not a straightforward task. As in the case of a contemporary state, who belongs can be looked at in terms of citizenship, but also in terms of who is included within the dominant narrative of national identity in the respective country. The dominant narrative of national identity requires placing the nation-state in time and space.

In order to look specifically at if and how 'normality' in Estonia has changed in the post-2004 context - which ostensibly signified becoming a 'normal' Western country again - the use of the term is contextually guided by Daina Stukuls Eglitis' (2002) work on Latvia and also by Sigrid Rausing's (2004) discussions based around the idea of 'normality' in Estonia in the early 1990s. These accounts are valuable in demonstrating the 'commonsense' perceptions of society, state and economics held by Estonia's inhabitants in the relatively early stages of its reconstruction as an independent state. However, Rausing's research is a deep anthropological study of a very specific locality and setting in Estonia in the early 90s. While it brings out some useful perspectives on 'normality', it is limited in its scope and was not intended to bring out the more comprehensive perceptions of 'normality' in Estonia even at the time.

Eglitis proposes a more useful and far-reaching model for defining 'normality' through spatial and temporal narrative constructions. The interplay of *spatial*, with emphasis on the 'West' as a natural place of belonging and themes of democracy and economic prosperity; and *temporal* as glorification of the inter-war period, national freedom and cultural development narratives over time provided a useful model for addressing Latvia's self-positioning at that time (Eglitis 2002). I argue, that this theoretical framework can be similarly applied in the case of Estonia. According to Eglitis' concept, the idea of this 'normality' was largely set against the 'abnormality' of the Soviet period and included general aspirations for an open society, democracy, markets, civil society. Both these studies were conducted prior to the Baltic States joining the EU and NATO, and there remains a gap as to addressing 'normality' in the post-accession context. This research aims to fill this gap.

The question becomes whether the same understandings can still be taken to apply in a very different context of 2013 when Estonia's statehood had been consolidated, society transformed by far-reaching processes of political, economic and social transformation during the 1990s and Estonia had joined an EU that was at the time experiencing a period of profound economic crisis? And if not, then how is 'normality' framed and interpreted in a more present-day context? In other words, the overarching question for this research is what kind of 'normality' is understood to have developed in Estonia after nearly a decade of formally validating its 'return to the Western World' through processes of accession to the EU and NATO that were widely hailed in the 1990s as drawing a line under the Soviet past.

The bottom-up approach taken here provides original and significant new insights into this complex topic. The substantial amount of new data gathered for this research in 2013 in the form of in-depth interviews using an innovative visual methodology will help to further our understandings of these complex processes.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The self-positioning within the international arena is closely tied to how Estonia and being Estonian is envisioned by the people living there. In the Estonian case, nation-building and through that understanding 'normality' has been bound up with the concept of 'return to Europe', which has blurred the boundaries between internal and external. At the same time, it is bound up with making a definitive break with the Soviet past which is still embodied by Russia in present-day official narratives. In the case of Russia, the internal and external boundary is also blurred, given the issue of the large Russian-speaking population in Estonia, which has tended to frame and dominate many previous studies. Exploring the various Others in Estonian national identity constructions and their possible merging into the Self therefore become the key dimensions to explore in this research. This thesis addresses grassroots understandings of Europe as the 'positive Other', Russia as the 'negative Other', and brings out how people's construction of national identity emerges from the ways in which they talk about everyday life.

The goal is not to achieve an 'objective' reality but to uncover a range of simultaneously existing identity constructs. Looking into how understandings of Estonian national identity have developed and how these constructions affect the everyday lives of the respondents, a better understanding of the various perspectives on social and political realities, through which the post-accession 'normality' in Estonia is constructed, is achieved. In order to fully address these issues, the main research question with three sub questions for this thesis are as follows:

> How is 'normality' constructed and understood by people in Estonia in the post-accession context?
>
> > - how did the relation between Estonia and the European Other change in constructions of Estonian identity during the first decade after accession to Western structures?
> >
> > - how did the mode of Othering Russia change in this new context?
> >
> > - how did people in Estonia negotiate the current 'normality' in their everyday perspective?

While interest in the construction of Estonian national identity has remained rather muted since 2004, the nature of the issue has arguably become more complex as the country distances itself from the simple binary of East/West. The economic crisis, which hit Europe in 2008, has intensified the competition for defining Europeanness, with Estonia perceiving itself as 'true Europe' in terms of neoliberal market values from both the top-down dimension as well as on the grassroots level, as I will demonstrate in the analysis. In light of this, the various perceptions of identity that are emerging between different groups of society, especially in the light of the economic crisis, deserve careful consideration.

This thesis claims that having acceded to the European Union and NATO in 2004, Estonia formally validated its place in Europe. However, the way in which this belonging to Europe is conceptualised by the people living in Estonia can vary. Top-down narratives launched by politicians and reiterated by the mainstream media discourse provide a basis for how people understand Estonia and its place in the wider world, but how this political discourse is received and re-contextualised on a grassroots level needs further examination.

Most existing studies on Estonia's identity-building process and its relation to Russia and history have focused on dominant discourses, media outlets, archives and survey results, with an emphasis on the role of the political elite. While there is strong agreement among scholars that multiple layers of inter-community identities do exist, the use of ethnographic and bottom-up methods, in order to receive a better understanding of the complexity of these identities, has hardly been utilised in the case of Estonia. As stated above, this research took a ground-up approach to analysing Estonia's current political and social situation, and through in-depth interviews offers a more detailed and nuanced insight into the life-worlds of the respondents and their constructions of Estonian 'normality'. The interviews also contained an aspect of visual methodology in order to generate additional insight into the issues under investigation. A range of images were included in the interviews to enhance quality and open up internal worlds and interpretations of participants regarding issues that one might not otherwise think to probe. These images were intended to reflect key themes and components of the dominant 'top-down' discourse, in order to discover how people interpret these at the everyday level. The themes of the images were chosen based on the existing body of academic research on Estonian national identity. This was then supplemented by analysis of a more dominant political and media discourse.

The main argument advanced in this thesis is that a certain 'normality' compatible with the Estonian national identity constructions had settled nearly a decade after joining the EU. What needs to be kept in mind though, is that this research was conducted in 2013, prior to Russia invading Ukraine in 2014 which established a new security structure - a 'new normality' in Europe - and altered Estonia's national identity constructions within it.

1.3 TRANSITION TO A 'NORMAL' EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

When Estonia regained independence in 1991, the inter-war experience of sovereignty (1918-1940) that Estonia had, was invoked as an ideal and a benchmark for further developments within politics, society and economics (see Smith 2003, Aalto 2003). This was set against the 'abnormality' of not only the

Soviet Union but also post-Soviet Russia, which has refused to accept the foundational narrative of Estonian statehood and is generally seen as neo-imperialist and a security threat to Estonia.

The Western political structures – namely EU and NATO – were seen as security guarantees by Estonia. It was widely believed that belonging to these institutions would protect Estonia's sovereignty. Additionally, the EU was seen as a proven model and a harbinger of the economic prosperity characteristic of Western Europe. The integration process, however, exposed tensions and different understandings and priorities held by the EU and Estonia.

Within this wider frame of regaining independence, the idea of 'returning to Europe' or 'returning to the Western World', which Estonia had been a part of during in the interwar period, plays a significant role in shaping the national identity perceptions in Estonia. On the one hand, it provides a wider framework for developing the understandings among the people in Estonia of what 'European' and 'Western' mean and the specific way in which Estonia fits within these categories.

The slogan 'Return to Europe' began to be voiced at demonstrations along with a desire for restored independence already in the late 1980s. This conveyed an idea that Estonia had formed part of 'Europe' between the wars; but, one can ask what did 'return to Europe' mean in a context shaped by the experience of the Cold War? Lennart Meri in 1991 gave a speech[1] in which he called Europe a goal, not a geographical concept. Europe was a goal because it formed an ethical, political and economic programme for Estonians which was counterpoised to a 'totalitarian past'.

> "We come from the same past, which is called totalitarianism and we're heading to the same future, named Europe." Lennart Meri (in Meri 1996: 268)

This 'returning to Europe' narrative was equalled to 'returning to the Western World' in terms of distancing from the Soviet Union - or the 'East' - and moving towards the opposite – the 'West'. However, and as will be discussed in this thesis

[1] Lennart Meri speech at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 26 November 1991

as well, 'Europe' and the 'West' have also been subject to redefinition following the end of the Cold War and especially following the enlargement of the institutions in question. Estonia cannot be seen simply as 'fitting' within these categories after officially validating its place in 2004, it has begun to play and active role in constructing them from within.

At the same time, the process of 'returning to Europe' itself has also been shaping perceptions of national identity. In the 1990s the main goal of re-establishing Estonia's place in Europe included joining the EU and NATO. Even though marking an official return to the 'Western world' through these structures was defined through collective security, there were cultural aspects firmly attached to this approach (see Lauristin, Vihalemm, Rosengren and Weibull 1997). The process of fulfilling the membership criteria in order to join these organisations became a part of how Estonia as a state was perceived by the Estonian people.

Transforming from a centralised totalitarian[2] political and state-controlled economic system to a democratic state and liberal market economy also required re-establishing the national identity narrative suppressed during the Soviet era. To lay out the context for the following chapters, the introduction provides a brief overview of some of the broad directions in Estonian politics since 1991 relevant for this research to allow for a better understanding of the processual development of the national identity narrative and through that, the 'normality' in Estonia.

1.4 FRAMING THE ESTONIAN 'POLITICAL COMMUNITY'

The principles of the re-established democratic state were set down in the new constitution adopted in 1992. It defines Estonia as a nation-state (by right of the people of Estonia to national self-determination) which is founded on liberty, justice and the rule of law, and emphasises the need to preserve the Estonian people, Estonian language and culture (preamble of The Constitution of the

[2] Academic debate is still ongoing as to exact nature (totalitarian to various forms of authoritarian) of the Soviet regime especially towards the end of it.

Republic of Estonia 1992). The principle of continuation of the Estonian state declared independent in 1918 and therefore the illegality of the Soviet occupation period is stated in the preamble of the constitution. The fundamental rights, freedoms and duties of the citizens were laid out and the functioning of key political institutions established. The framework for becoming a democratic country was therefore in place and the first steps towards 'returning to Europe' taken. However, substantiating this framework with political, economic and social processes is a more complicated task. In this study, these processes are seen as mutually constitutive with Estonian national identity constructions which both guide the policy direction and are continuously shaped by the very same processes.

In looking at national identity and nation as 'imagined political community', then, as mentioned, who is included in this perceived political community plays a significant role in how it is understood. After the repressive Soviet era migration policies had left Estonia with a considerable Russian-speaking ethnic minority, restrictive citizenship and language laws were adopted in the immediate aftermath of regaining independence in an attempt to 'restore' also the ethnic composition of the interwar Estonian Republic. The 1938 Estonian Citizenship Law was used as a basis in 1992 to grant citizenship to those who held Estonian citizenship before June 16, 1940 and their descendants.

In 1992, this meant that almost a third of the population, mostly Russian-speakers who settled in Estonia during the Soviet times and their descendants, became 'aliens' without the citizenship of their country of residence or voting rights, and in the first parliamentary election held in Estonia in the same year, 100% of the deputies were ethnic Estonians (Pettai 1998). Language requirements are also a condition for naturalisation in Estonia and using the common language, meaning Estonian, has been the centrepiece of Estonian policy for integrating the Russian-speakers. These restrictions on citizenship and language for the *Russophones* residing in Estonia exemplify the rationale of minimising Russian influence in the region after half a decade of Soviet rule aiming to dismantle any sense of Estonian national self-esteem, and at the same time promoting national identity as one of the fundamental values. These early 1990s Citizenship and Language laws proved somewhat contentious at the time and have gone through various amendments.

The language laws received expected critique from Russia, but also from international organisations. Russia's grievances about the situation of the national minorities in Estonia were regarded as an attempt to interfere in Estonia's internal affairs and further the depiction that Estonia still belongs to its sphere of influence. However, the conditionality attached to the European Union membership had some effect (among others) in the implementation of revised policies in this matter (see Smith 2002a, 2003b; Sasse 2008). The purpose here is not to evaluate how influential this conditionality clause has been to changing the conditions on the ground, but to show that Estonia demonstrated the will to comply with the norms in order to, among other motives, advance the 'return to Europe'.

In 1997, when Estonia received an early invitation for starting membership negotiations to be included in the European Union, the official policy discourse started to focus on the need for integration of non-Estonian residents into Estonian society (Budryte 2005: 78). In 1998 the Citizenship Law of Estonia was amended to improve the condition of 'stateless children' (Budryte 2005: 82; Pettai and Kallas 2009: 111). Seven-year integration programmes have been in place since 2000 (current one renamed 'Integrating Estonia 2020'). The closing of the OSCE mission in 2001 and Estonia's accession to the EU and NATO in 2004 provided validation for these policies by the West and could be interpreted as passing the 'international litmus test' (Hughes 2005: 24). Additionally, the new integration programmes demonstrate a shift in the approach to integration with the current one 'Integrating Estonia 2020' (p. 3) clearly stating that integration should be seen as a holistic process in the society and not based only on language or nationality. So, to what extent are understandings of societal divisions in terms of language, citizenship and nationality still relevant in Estonia nearly a decade after the accession?

A case that provides a heightened context for analysing the relevance of these aspects is the relocation of the Bronze Soldier in 2007, which was an indication that the integration process was not finished, and raises the question of how people relate to this issue in general in a post-accession context and after more than five years had passed? Are ethno-linguistic cleavages still the most important feature of Estonian society, which has by far been the biggest focus of attention

in existing studies, in a post-EU context, or is the picture actually far more complex than this? The data-analysis carried out for this thesis indicates the latter.

1.5 'NORMALISING' RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

While the situation of Russian-speakers in Estonia has been a contentious one between Estonia and Russia, there have been a range of other matters complicating the relationship as well. Examples are the Border Agreement, which is yet to be ratified at the time of writing this thesis, German-Russian gas pipe (Nord Stream), trade and transit issues etc. These are only a few mentioned prior to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its continued hostile activities in the Donbass region, which as stated, can be seen to constitute the 'new normality' in Europe.

However, 'normal' relations with Russia were advocated for in the 1990s. As David J. Smith argues, in the wake of Russian troops withdrawal in 1994, Estonia began to focus its attention upon westward integration, and this also dictated a new approach to relations with Russia – being a 'normal' European country meant conducting its foreign policy like one and a willingness to move towards 'normalisation' of relations with Russia was placed in this context (2003: 169). As stated above, entry to collective security organisations was expected to 'normalise' relations with Russia. However, and as has been rightly argued even pre-2014, this prospect failed to conform to the predictions advanced by the Estonian political elite in the 1990s (Berg and Ehin 2009; Mälksoo 2009). Nearly a decade after formally becoming part of the 'West', Estonian identity politics can be said to have shaped an alternative 'reality' to what was expected in Estonian-Russian relations, a 'reality' which constantly reconstructs the securitised nature of Estonian-Russian relations. That Russia is seen as a perennial Other - as an imperialistic, backward and a more traditional country in its security logic - has not lost its relevance in Estonian (and European) identity construction.

In addition, Estonia joined the European Union and NATO at a time when the 'West' itself no longer appeared fixed, but rather as something 'fluid and contested' (Lehti 2007: 137-138), and so the perception of being part of 'Europe' requires an assessment of the construction of 'Europe' in its own right, both spatially and temporally at the EU level, and an examination of the mutually contingent relationship between Estonian and EU narratives. After almost ten years officially within the union, the question now becomes how Estonia contributes to this construction?

1.6 THE ONLY 'TRUE' CHOICE – NEOLIBERALISM

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonia was facing a dual challenge in moving from a planned economy to a market one and trying to transform its provincial economy to correspond to the globalised market environment (Smith 2002b: 113).

The first free parliamentary election in 1992 brought a right-centre coalition to power who supported the radical marketisation and Westernisation of Estonia's economy and implemented 'shock-therapy', one of the most radical agendas for post-communist reform (Lauristin and Vihalemm 2009: 9). The new political elite quickly introduced liberalisation, stabilisation, privatisation, and structural and institutional reforms despite having little experience and limited resources, both human and financial. This is undoubtedly so, despite claims that Estonia was better prepared and had a more competent political elite than some of the others, having prepared for the implementation of IME[3] (self-managing Estonia) programme already in 1988-1991 (Norkus 2007: 23). The neoliberal policy choices adopted in Estonia and advocated by the Washington consensus (currency boards with fixed pegs, fiscal discipline, liberalisation of prices and trade, and wide-ranging privatisation) appeared to have put Estonia and the other Baltic states on a remarkable growth track which was only interrupted by the Russian crisis at the end of 1990s (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 427).

[3] *Isemajandav Eesti*

The strength of the market-liberal parties in the 1992 election illustrates the strong popular support for such ideas at the time (Feldman and Sally 2002: 89) and public opinion remained supportive of reform policies throughout the entire period of transition (Lauristin and Vihalemm 2009: 11). Lauristin and Vihalemm argue that the majority accepted shock therapy as the only safe way to get out of Russia's economic influence and achieve economic sustainability, and this was communicated from the local authorities in the 'voice of international authorities and 'higher' national interests' (2009: 11). While the results of these reforms were not immediate and Estonia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was in decline in the beginning of the 1990s, the rapid economic growth that started from 1995 just as restlessness with the reforms had started to surface, justified these and affirmed radical marketisation as the only 'true' option. Already in 1994 Estonia was hailed 'a shining star from the Baltics' for its economic performance by foreign economic analysts John Hansen and Piritta Sorsa (1994) and in 1997, the EU invited Estonia to begin negotiations on accession two years ahead of the other Baltic states in light of this performance (Norkus 2007: 21-22). The external image of Estonia's economy was an overwhelmingly positive one. Estonia was depicted as the 'Baltic Tiger' in terms of the substantial economic growth of the 2000s prior to the economic crisis, Hong Kong of Europe (Feldman and Sally 2002) in reference to Hong Kong's economic achievements, low tax and efficient business environment. A Newsweek headline in 1993 read 'Estonia: The Little Country That Could' and talked about the successful economic transformation Estonia had made from the Soviet system (even if this supplement in Newsweek had been purchased by Estonia to promote itself and strengthen its appeal for foreign investments). The impact that this had on Estonia's national identity should not be underestimated. But how, more exactly, has this 1990s transition period between a Soviet past and still vaguely defined prosperous European future shaped Estonian identity constructions?

In general, Estonia had experienced a rather sustained economic growth from 1995 to 2008 with only the interruption in 1998-1999 in relation to the Russian financial crisis. Economic growth continued from 2000 and after accession to the EU, there was an unprecedented boom in the Estonian economy with the average annual growth rate 8.5 percent (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 427-428). This ended with the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008, even though as Karsten Staehr

(2015) points out, the quarter-on-quarter growth rates had already turned negative in Estonia from the second half of 2007. He demonstrates that the GDP declined by approximately 14 percent in 2009 in all of the Baltic States, a deeper decline than in any other EU country and even though GDP growth bounced back in 2010 and 2011, it had since then been rather muted (Staehr 2015: 3-4). However, due to the years of growth, the magnitude of the economic downturn came as a surprise to the local policymakers and was not foreseen by the academic circles either (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 429).

Kattel and Raudla (2013) bring in the term nationalist neoliberalism to comprehend Estonia's responses to the economic crisis, which also provides a good basis for understanding the post-economic-crisis 'normality' addressed in this study. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a specific form of capitalism – embedded capitalism - developed in Eastern Europe, which works in a different manner to the originally proposed understanding whereby the state functions as a curtailer of free market excesses by means of social protection mechanisms, and rather that self-regulating markets are seen as bringing social well-being (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 442). This construct can work by instrumentalising the idea of nation and nationalism as a substitute for social wellbeing, and so, it is not that much a socially more balanced society what capitalism in this case can deliver, but rather the survival of the nation (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 442). Kattel and Raudla (2013: 442) argue that this form of nationalist neoliberalism developed in its purest form in Estonia, the characteristics of which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

As this study also demonstrates, the low levels of economic growth have done little to shift the understandings of the non-negotiable acceptance of the neoliberal paradigm, seen here broadly as entrepreneurial beliefs, attitudes and thinking - that a free market will allow efficiency, economic growth and technological progress to occur - which guide the understandings of people's lives and identities. Within this paradigm, the emphasis is on market relations, lack of state intervention, and individual responsibility.

Neoliberalism has been advocated for by the Estonian elites and, as the data gathered for this research also demonstrates, widely accepted by the people on

the ground, who have also been part of the process of shaping these understandings from the early 1990s onward. Even though this has given Estonia the image of an economic success story, the implications of this national narrative ought to be considered as well.

It is hardly surprising that the neoliberal approach of minimal state interference has had an impact on the social sphere. The 2011 Estonian Human Development Report which focused specifically on achievements made during the first 20 years after re-establishing independence shows how the social indicators in the Baltic States were lagging clearly behind the so-called old EU states in terms of minimum wage, social protection expenditure, poverty and income inequality. The relative poverty indicators and shadow economy share were high in the Baltic States also in comparison to the so-called new EU states (Aidukaite 2011: 71). The emphasis on neoliberal individualistic values has done little to ease social inequalities in Estonia. The rate of people living in relative poverty has not really decreased even as the economy has been on the rise after the economic crisis and poverty risk amongst the elderly has been a particular problem in Estonia as well (Eurostat). The gender pay-gap in Estonia is highest among the EU countries, still reaching over 25% in 2017 (Eurostat).

The poorer population has not benefited as much from the neoliberal reforms and there are problems with the rates of domestic violence, alcoholism, crime, suicides etc (see Usha 2017). The 'normalised' understanding of 'fair competition' in the neoliberal paradigm can be said to also lead to a reluctance to make policy changes to further the more socially caring agenda in Estonia and the associated individualistic values tend to place the blame rather on the individual than the political elite for these issues. The theory chapter (Chapter 2) brings out how and why the constructions of 'normality' are relatively stable over time and this further helps explain the prevalence of these perceptions in Estonia.

Also, as Thorhallsson and Kattel point out, the economic problems, especially during the economic crisis, were blamed on exogenous factors (2013: 94), meaning that the underlying principles of Estonian structural economy were not placed under any doubt by the population. The Estonian political elite, who has been successful in advocating for the neoliberal agenda, have therefore had little

reason to make changes, since it has been supported relatively broadly in the Estonian population.

1.7 A RECAP OF THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN ESTONIA

Even though the Estonian political landscape in terms of changing ministers and merging or splitting of political parties might appear volatile from the beginning of 1990s, the general policy line has been relatively stable throughout the period after regaining independence and this overview of the main parties in power and opposition is provided as context for the data collection and analysis done for this study. For a better understanding of the political development in Estonia, I have also included a brief examination of the main political parties' agendas since the first parliamentary election held in 1992.

The parliamentary (*Riigikogu*) election in 1992 brought victory to the right-wing conservative Fatherland Bloc (*Valimisliit Isamaa*). One of the first items on their election platform was, not surprisingly, that Estonia was in need of change. They were presenting an alternative to the leftist world view aiming to 'liberalise the economy [and make] radical economic reform' (Isamaa 1992: 3). Fatherland Bloc's economic agenda ahead of the 1992 election stated that they will stop the socialist system where the state's massive bureaucracy is used for redistributing the income from high taxation – 'every person should have the opportunity to decide for themselves, how to use their income' (p. 10). The idea behind this was to place tax on goods rather than income and increase people's drive to higher salaries. Their economic agenda supported minimal taxation with the programme stating 'the lower the taxes, the wealthier the society' (p. 11).

Fatherland Bloc's economic agenda was driven from their understanding of social market economy where private capital was viewed as holy and untouchable (p. 9). Other issues of main importance for the electoral alliance at the time were issues of state security, especially in regard to the Russian troops still in Estonia, de-sovietisation of the Estonian society, placing the individual ahead of the state and putting together a government implementing right-wing policy (Isamaa 1992:

3-4). The flat income tax (26%) was introduced with Fatherland Bloc's Prime Minister Mart Laar's government in 1994 and this has remained one of the tenets of Estonian taxation system since then (the flat income tax has even been lowered by the Reform Party since 2006 to reach 20% in 2015).

The shock neoliberal economic reforms instigated by the Mart Laar government after the 1992 election resulted in a temporary backlash to this agenda in the 1995 parliamentary election, mainly due to the high social cost of these reforms (Saarts and Lumi 2012: 204). The economic situation in Estonia had not dramatically improved by 1995 election and this created a protest vote against Laar's radical reform agenda and Fatherland Bloc had a dramatic fall of votes in the 1995 election. The 1995 election saw the electoral alliance Coalition Party and Country Union (*Koonderakonna ja Maarahva Ühendus (KMÜ)*) win comprehensively (41 seats out of 101).

KMÜ won the election by presenting itself as more experienced and reliable, 'competent, capable and with a sense of mission' (*Eesti Koonderakonna programmilised seisukohad 1993: 3*) as opposed to the young and new politicians. Just a reminder that Mart Laar was 32 years old when he became Prime Minister in 1992. The main agenda for most parties at the time, however, had not changed significantly. The aim was still to continue with the reforms and developing the market economy. As to financial policy, the emphasis was still on a balanced budget and stability of the Estonian currency (*Kroon*). KMÜ was not advocating for raising taxes but saw it possible to make changes within the taxation system (p. 13). Economically they were running on an 'open social market economy' platform.

KMÜ won a landslide victory and the period 1995-1999 is the only exception between the right-wing governments in Estonia up to 2016, and even this government cannot be considered left-wing. KMÜ formed a coalition at first with the Centre Party (the main opposition to the Reform Party in the ensuing years), but this fell through quickly and between 1995-1997 KMÜ formed a coalition with the Reform Party and the liberal-centrist Development Party (*Arengupartei*). This coalition basically continued with the previous government's economic policies. This change in 1995 was, as Saarts and Lumi point out, was in line with the wider

trend in Central and Eastern Europe, where the radical market economy got replaced by a more moderate agenda (2012: 204).

The 1995 election was significant in the sense that they saw the rise of the newcomer, the Reform Party (19 seats), the main driver of the liberal economic agenda for years to come, onto the Estonian party landscape. Since then the Reform Party has established itself as the dominant force in Estonian politics. It rose to power in the 1999 election, was involved in forming the government in Estonia until 2016, and has won the parliamentary election in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

The 1999 parliamentary election saw the beginning of a more consolidated party system in Estonia (Saarts and Lumi 2012: 205). The electoral alliances were abolished, and this forced the parties to deal with developing their organisational structures (2012: 205). The main conflict at the time was whether to be for or against the Centre Party – or more specifically its leader (this dynamic will be discussed in more detail below). While the Reform Party's platform for the 1995 election started with an emphasis on family issues, the 1999 programme begins straight with the economic perspective stating that the Estonian state is as strong as is its economy (p. 1). The stability of the Kroon, a balanced budget, economic growth, no increase in taxation - 'the Reform Party will not allow the state to unfairly take away your income and redistribute them just for the sake of redistribution' (p. 2) - were all included in the relatively short manifesto. The more conservative family values perspective with a promise for financial support was still included in their agenda as well. The 1999 election also had the largest gap in party manifestos in terms of placement to the left or right on the ideological spectrum. The Centre Party drifted more to the left while the Pro Patria Union (*Isamaaliit*) placed itself more to the right (see Toomla 2012). As Toomla (2012) points out, in all other elections (at least until 2011) the main party programmes have been relatively close in the centre.

The Centre Party was advocating for progressive taxation in its campaign for the 1999 election. It is worth noting that the 1999 election was held during another economic crisis affecting Estonia – the Russian financial crisis. This backdrop might have had some effect on the election with the oppositional Centre Party coming

out on top (28 seats). The Pro Patria Union and Reform Party both got 18 seats, and the Moderates (*Mõõdukad*) 17. The three latter, however, having reached an agreement early on, formed the coalition, with Mart Laar from the Pro Patria Union serving as Prime Minister for the second time. Estonia managed to pull out of the Russian economic crisis in a relatively short time – only a year and a half- with Estonia's clear direction towards joining the EU playing an important role in this (Rei 2009: 9). This adds another possible explanatory factor to the positive image of Estonia's economic success through the more liberal economic policies.

The 2003 general election brought in a new but temporary political force in Estonia – the Res Publica party. However, their populist agenda and forming a coalition with the Reform Party saw little change in the overall dominating narrative. Res Publica's success in the early 2000s can be seen as a protest against the government but directed rather at the ruling elite than the ideology. The populist agenda of countering corruption and demanding change proved to be relatively short-lived and Res Publica merged with the right-wing conservative Pro Patria Union in 2006 to form the Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (*Erakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit*). Saarts and Lumi argue that even though there are several reasons for the short-lived success of Res Publica, one of the explanations was that the right-wing spectrum of the Estonian party system was already exhausted (Pro Patria Union, Reform Party) (2012: 206).

The 2003 Reform Party election platform had a focus on family and children while emphasising the party's success in Estonia's economic development. They firmly supported joining the European Union and clearly stated the need to 'preserve our advantages, prove and defend the superiority of our liberal economic model also in the European Union' (Reform Party election platform 2003). And even though the coalition was in the end formed by Res Publica, the general neoliberal agenda remained unchanged. It is worth noting that the Centre Party managed to get more votes than Res Publica in the 2003 election but was again left out of forming the government. The Centre Party finally managed to get into the government in 2005 after the Res Publica-led coalition was dissolved and a new coalition was created with Andrus Ansip from Reform Party serving as the Prime Minister (a position he remained in until 2014). Both these coalitions also involved People's

Union of Estonia *(Rahvaliit*) (an agrarian party whose predecessor was part of the KMÜ alliance).

The 2007 Riigikogu election brought about the infamous slogan from the Reform Party about taking Estonia into the five richest countries in Europe in 15 years. The emphasis was again on supporting families, low taxation and improving conditions for entrepreneurs in Estonia. Reform Party won the election and the support for Prime Minister Andrus Ansip was further consolidated by the removal and events surrounding the Bronze Soldier in April 2007.

The Reform Party was also quite a comprehensive winner in the 2011 Riigikogu election. Their 2011 election platform already brings in the Nordic dimension – stating that Estonia has the best economic environment in the Nordic countries. Otherwise the Nordic example in their manifesto is mostly addressed in reference to the level of education, infrastructure and environment. The 2015 platform takes this element much further and is discussed in more depth in section 3.5.

The 2007 and 2011 elections saw the success of the Reform Party further consolidated. The party held the Prime Minister position from 2005-2016. Even more, the Reform Party has been part of the ruling coalitions since 1999 and their agenda has had a significant impact on Estonia's political path in the 2000s. The success of the Reform Party with its neoliberal agenda demonstrates the wider acceptance of this paradigm by a significant part of the Estonian population. After the brief backlash in 1995 to the radical economic reforms introduced in 1992, the neoliberal agenda has not been challenged by the voters in Estonia since 1999. Even though the 1990s neoliberal capitalism in Estonia was not the result of an original Estonian thought, but rather reflecting the international economic policy dogmas of the time (Kattel 2012: 393), this research shows that the belief in the success of these policies has been internalised in Estonia.

It is therefore not surprising that the Estonian political parties have not significantly shifted from the liberal economic agenda. The only larger parties in the Estonian political spectrum advocating for a wider state involvement and a progressive income tax have been the Centre Party and the Social Democratic Party (former Moderates). The Centre Party positions itself centre-left on the

ideological spectrum, appealing to the votes of pensioners, Russian-speaking minority, lower-income groups and protest votes. As discussed, the left-wing of the political spectrum has not gained much traction in Estonia with the more moderate Social Democratic Party serving at most as a partner in the right-wing Reform Party and Pro Patria Party governing coalitions prior to 2014 (e.g. 2007-2009; Moderates in 1999-2002).

Assessing the platforms and success of political parties at the Riigikogu elections since 1992 demonstrates that the Reform Party's neoliberal agenda had been relatively widely accepted by the second half of 2000s, and even prior to that, the general political direction was mostly in line with this perspective. The 1995 victory of KMÜ coming as a result of a backlash against shock reforms did little to derail Estonia from this course. And the 2003 Res Publica led coalition was not advocating for any major shift in the economic thinking as the party placed itself also on the right-wing of the ideological spectrum.

As demonstrated, the centre-right parties have dominated the political landscape since 1992 and the neoliberal economic paradigm has been dominant in Estonia. The liberal market agenda has been most forcefully driven by the Reform Party, who has participated in most government coalitions since 1995. Since 2005 to 2013, when the interviews were conducted, the Reform Party's agenda had been dominating the political scene with them holding the Prime Minister position since 2005 and the party winning the general election in 2007, 2011 (and again in 2015 and 2019). At the time of conducting this study, it was in government with its head, Andrus Ansip, serving as Prime Minister. Ansip served as Prime Minister of Estonia for nearly a decade - from April 2005 to March 2014 and was until July 2019 the European Commissioner for Digital Single Market and Vice President of the European Commission. Even though the Reform Party won the 2015 parliamentary election, it was ousted from the government in late 2016 with a vote of no confidence for the Prime Minister, Taavi Rõivas, at the time. However, as discussed, their proposed approach has been widely accepted in the Estonian society, given the party's success in four consecutive elections, including their re-election after the global economic crisis, and provides a basis for better understanding the ideational political and social frameworks in Estonia when this research was conducted.

The main opposition party to the Reform Party has for years been the Centre Party, whose ideology can be described as social-liberal, but has also received a populist reputation in Estonia with its long-time leader, Edgar Savisaar, who with his declining health was under trial with criminal charges of corruption from 2015-2018 (case dismissed in the end due to his health), having a dominant role in the party and an authoritarian style of running it. Savisaar has a long history in Estonian politics, as he was a co-founder of the Popular Front (*Rahvarinne*) movement in 1988.

The Centre Party has ties to Russia and a cooperation agreement with Russia's dominant party, United Russia, which has been (and still is) a source of controversy in Estonia. The Party has drawn on the Russian-speaking population's votes and has been successful in winning the local elections in Tallinn for years, with Savisaar being the mayor of Tallinn from 2001-2004 and 2007-2015. Due to the criminal charges brought against him, he was removed as the acting mayor in 2015. Savisaar was also ousted as the long-term Chairman of the Centre Party in 2016, and shortly after the election of the new head for the party, Jüri Ratas, a vote of no confidence was issued in the parliament for the serving Prime Minister, Taavi Rõivas, and the Centre Party along with the Social Democratic Party and Pro Patria and Res Publica Union formed a new coalition with Jüri Ratas as the new head of government. The Centre Party's possible inclusion in coalition governments in recent years had remained closed off because of the leader of the party. All the controversies surrounding the Centre Party, but also the Reform Party and various other political parties and politicians in Estonia are too detailed to bring out in this brief contextual background for the thesis, but just to note that Estonia has not been immune to this over the past years.

However, one further recent shift in the political party landscape deserves mentioning, even though it does not directly affect the time this research was conducted. Along with the migration crisis in Europe and the surge of populist parties in general, there has been a noteworthy rise of the far-right Conservative People's Party of Estonia since the beginning of 2015, with the party winning 7 seats in the parliament at the 2015 election. Even though the hardship was significant in Estonia during the economic crisis and severe austerity measures were adopted to combat it, the impact of rightist populism compared to some

other European countries was perhaps not quite as severe. Even so, the support for the far-right party has been on the rise since these elections.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This study is divided into eight sections. After the introduction, a theoretical framework is provided for understanding how 'normality' and national identity are approached in the study at hand. It outlines the main approach to 'normality' relying on Barbara Misztal's work (2001, 2010) on using the concept in sociological research and brings forward the theoretical premises I use for understanding group identity. For the latter, I draw on the work of Henry Hale (2008), who argues that groups are constructed as a means for reducing uncertainty and navigating the social world. Hale defines identity as a set of points of personal reference people rely on to navigate the social world and groups are formed by having common relationships to points of reference. And this is how 'normality' is seen in this research – it is an ideational collection of 'thicker' or more meaningful points of reference related to perceptions of national identity to which people in Estonia have common relationships – the commonsense or taken-for-granted perceptions of the social world. This is followed by a discussion on the concept of national identity within the constructivist paradigm and a look into *how* it is constructed. Last but certainly not least, the chapter finishes with providing an overview of the contextual 'normality' in relation to Estonia's nation-building process starting from the beginning of 1990s. As mentioned earlier, the concept of 'normality' in relation to nation-building in Latvia and Estonia has been used by Daina Stukuls Eglitis (2002) and also Sigrid Rausing (2004), and their work has guided the overall conceptual framework for this research. This general overview of the theoretical premises is then followed by an overview of the existing academic literature on Estonian national identity.

The literature review chapter situates the current study in relation to existing work on the question of national identity in contemporary Estonia and demonstrates how the themes addressed in this prior research guide the study at hand. In this regard, 'returning to Europe', constructions of Russia as the Other in

Estonia's identity-building process and conflicting narratives of history emerge as the underlying themes which have framed Estonia's identity construction. The wider over-arching concept of 'normality' is furnished in this section with the various core themes of Estonian national identity brought forward by the bulk of research conducted on the topic since the 1990s.

First, it discusses the role conflicting narratives of history with Russia and memory politics in general play in Estonia's identity and how it frames the policy-making. The significant works of Berg and Ehin (2009), Mälksoo (2006, 2009, 2010), Kasekamp and Brüggemann (2009), Brüggemann (2007), Fofanova and Morozov (2009), Onken (2007, 2009, 2011), Smith (2010, 2012), Lehti (2010) and others are discussed in this section. Second, since identity is always constructed in relation to an Other, the various Others of Estonia's identity-building process are discussed. This includes the widely discussed threatening qualities of Russia as the Other, but also how the perceptions of Europe and the European Union guide Estonia's self-positioning in the international sphere and how this in turn impacts upon people's perceptions of everyday life and through that 'normality' on a grassroots level. Third, the literature review chapter gives an overview of other labels attached, whether internally or externally, to Estonia's self-definition. These include regional identification labels such as Baltic or Nordic, temporal concepts such as 'new' Europe, and attempts to establish Estonia as the flexible, innovative and an economic success story within the new democracies of 1990s. The idea of nationalist neoliberalism in Estonia is discussed through the work of Kattel and Raudla (2013). The core themes presented in the volume of previous research on Estonian national identity guided my choice of images used during the interview process.

The fourth chapter discusses the methodology of this research. It provides a theoretical overview why interviews and visual methods are applied for this case, reflects on the process of interviewing and the data collected with this method. It covers a range of aspects related to fieldwork in Estonia and discusses some ethical implications that accompanied the research process. An overview of media analysis and the process of analysing the interview data are also provided.

The fifth chapter is the first of three empirical chapters that bring out the analysis conducted for this study. It discusses the perceptions of 'Europe' more generally and the European Union specifically and is separated into two sections accordingly. While 'Europe' is seen as more fluid category based on values, with boundaries drawn according to perceived cultural differences, the European Union is understood more commonly in terms of fixed rules and regulations applied to formal member states. The main argument in this chapter is that these values and the idea of belonging to Europe - the construction of 'European normality' - has been taken in without much self-reflection. The non-negotiable acceptance of the neoliberal paradigm shapes these values and Estonia is seen as embodying the 'true' Europe in terms of adopting austerity measures. A clear dividing line could be drawn in this regard between the Northern and Southern Europe, a new spatial 'normality' within the overarching and increasingly contested category of Europeanness. A further significant element arising in this chapter is the notion of a 'Second Estonian Republic' as a new temporal reference point for respondents within an EU context. By this, I mean that people no longer look to the interwar period as a foundation for the present-day Estonian identity; instead, they invoke the 'sovereign' Estonian Republic during the period between regaining independence in 1991 and joining the EU and NATO in 2004. This suggests - following Eglitis' framework - that the 1990s produced a new temporal 'normality' for understanding the identity-constructions of post-accession Estonia.

The sixth chapter looks at Russia as the Other in understanding Estonian national identity. The material analysed in this chapter shows that issues of security have not lost their relevance in Estonia's relations with its 'Eastern neighbour' within the decade following the accession to the EU and NATO, but certain new aspects have emerged. The first part of this chapter focuses on the securitised nature and threatening qualities of Estonian-Russian relations while the second part looks at the non-threatening qualities i.e. pragmatic, economic ones within Othering Russia in Estonian identity-building process. The research demonstrates that the threat emanating from Russia was still a valid concern for the Estonian-speaking respondents in 2013. The data analysis shows that Russia's nostalgia for the Soviet Union and its expansionist interests had not disappeared with Estonia joining the EU and NATO. However, the traditional security dimension can be seen to have diminished to a degree and a more 'cultural' way of Othering had become

applicable within securitising relations with Russia. The most significant finding in this chapter, however, was the prevalence of the neoliberal economic narrative in perceptions of relations with Russia which has emerged in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Having spent almost a decade in the EU and NATO in relatively calm times in terms of security (prior to 2014), the chapter demonstrates that a certain 'normalisation' – different to that which had been articulated as a goal in the 1990s - had been achieved in relation to Russia and that pragmatic economic themes had become more relevant in people's everyday perceptions.

The previous two chapters focused on the post-EU accession understandings of the Estonian Self through its relationship to two external Others - Europe and Russia - chapter seven will provide an understanding of how the respondents discussed the internal essence of Estonia as a state nearly a decade on from EU accession. The chapter brings out the everyday experiences of the participants which emerged from the rich data. These experiences are examined from the standpoint of the dominant neoliberal paradigm underpinning constructions of Estonia's identity as well as the more emotional, securitised angle, in terms of the interethnic relations in Estonia. The chapter is split up into three sections: societal integration, economic aspects and political system. To summarise, the chapter explains that even though themes of language, cultural Othering and education are still important dividing factors in perceived ethnic boundaries in Estonia, the picture is far more complex with the reconciliation between the pragmatic understanding of economic necessity and the more national emotional element being pertinent in understanding interethnic relations in Estonia a decade since joining the Western structures. The main argument in this chapter is that the post-crisis economic fatigue appears to have increased the importance of the neoliberal paradigm within Estonian national identity constructions and provided a consolidating element in the interethnic relations as the Russophone interview findings also suggested a generalised trend towards pragmatic adaptation to new realities rather than voice of protest. Another key finding in this chapter confirms the findings in chapter five in terms of a shift in the temporal narrative of 'normality' in relation to the glorification of the 1990s as an idealised benchmark.

Chapter eight pulls together the main findings of this study and posits possibilities for further research.

1.9 POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

This study falls within the qualitative paradigm and seeks to uncover how 'normality' in relation to national identity discourse shapes people's perceptions of Estonia's place in the international sphere, how it frames their understandings of various social, economic and political aspects in their everyday lives a decade since officially becoming a member of the European Union and NATO. The goal of the study is not to provide a comprehensive and representative overview of what is Estonian national identity, but rather to further the understanding of the complex process of how socially constructed national identity themes frame and continue to be shaped by the people in Estonia.

The insights from this study can be used to address questions of foreign and internal policy in Estonia, to understand the more complex approach people in Estonia have towards the EU, in regard to relations with Russia and more generally placing Estonia in the international sphere. Even though national identity, and especially national identity of the former Soviet countries, received a fair amount of attention in the 1990s and to a degree in the 2000s, there is a limited amount of research conducted to obtain the perspectives on the grassroots level in Estonia. This study aims to fill this gap to an extent and help to uncover relevant questions for further research on the topic. The results can be used for studies researching how various policies have impacted and are perceived by people in Estonia, for developing questionnaires for statistical, and for policy-making purposes. Additionally, the methodological approach of this study demonstrates the added value visual aids can bring to a complex research topic like national identity.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL PREMISES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the importance of why and how Estonian 'normality' and national identity are analysed here, it is necessary to provide an overview of the theoretical framework guiding my research and unpack the key concepts discussed in this thesis. This chapter first presents the theoretical premises for why 'normality' is a valuable concept, for understanding people's perceptions of the social world and exploring Estonia's national identity constructions. It then draws on Henry Hale's (2008) sophisticated account of identity and group formation in order to argue that national identity (like ethnic identity – the focus of Hale's analysis) is based on uncertainty reduction, and that the broader concept of 'normality' has an important role to play in this. In the remainder of the chapter, I first discuss the existing theories on national identity and explain the social constructivist approach that is employed in this thesis. Finally, I discuss the more specific Estonian 'normality' narratives brought forward and analysed by previous researchers. This leads the way to the more comprehensive overview of the academic literature which then usefully sets the scene for the empirical chapters to follow.

2.2 'NORMALITY' IN THE SOCIAL WORLD

We often hear the word 'normal' used to describe a situation in a particular country or its relations with another. Normal life, normal politics, normal relations. The term is far from straightforward and to presume that everybody

attaches the exact same meaning to it would be fanciful to say the least. Having said this, there do appear to be certain broad shared understandings within different groups about what is considered 'normal' in the social world in general, a society, its various subgroups etc. (see Goffmann 1983, Misztal 2010, Eglitis 2002). This section provides a theoretical overview of the concept, looking at why and how 'normality' is seen to exist and how utilising this concept can help us further our understandings of national identity constructions in Estonia.

Very broadly put, 'normality' is understood here as 'the social world as it is described in the here and now: the implicit, the common sense, the taken for granted, which is perceived as the unquestionable basis for everyday action and a fortiori political action' (Croce and Salvatore 2016: 288). Common sense and taken-for-granted situations are described as such because they do not usually get noticed by the people living in them. In so far as these ideational frames of 'normality' form a basic and almost undetectable part of the organisation of people's lives, the fact that they rely on them becomes apparent mainly in times of crisis (Misztal 2015: 3). This applies clearly in the case for Estonia, where the 'abnormality' of the Soviet times can be seen as the *crisis*, which brought up perceptions of what 'normal' Estonia would have been and would be like had the Soviet occupation not taken place. However, the 1990s political transformation and the economic 'shock' therapy can be seen to constitute another period of crisis in Estonia. One could also argue that another crisis hit Europe in 2014 with Russia's illegal takeover of Crimea, which forced a closer examination of the European 'normality' (from the EU level as well as on individual states including Estonia) and brought about a further 'new normality' as referred to in Chapter 1. I will discuss the particular theoretical groundings for Estonian 'normality' prior to 2014 in more detail in the last part of this chapter. First, I will start by drawing out the theoretical premise for using 'normality' more generally and discuss how national identity is situated within this wider framework.

This broader theoretical notion of 'normality' can be used in the case of any society as a way of guiding our understanding of the frames in which 'people see and interpret their particular historical circumstances' (Misztal 2015: 1). Such frames are delimited by the cultural repertoires to which people have access and the structural context in which they live (Misztal 2015: 1). Barbara Misztal, who

has extensively dealt with the concept, explains that in the wider sense 'normality' can be regarded as perceptions which do not depart negatively from the particular expectations shared by the wider society. That being a 'normal person', a human being like anyone else, means incorporating standards from wider society and meeting others' expectations about what we ought to be. Simply put, 'abnormal' persons are those individuals who are deprived of the claims and the institutional supports to normal identity that are taken for granted by the majority of others (Misztal 2001: 316-317). Conceptualising 'normality' therefore entails consideration of how these wider standards are defined and imposed.

Another crucial aspect of Misztal's approach to the concept of 'normality' for the research at hand is its aspirational quality. As she points out in her research, people living in undemocratic nations often express the desire to live in a 'normal' country (Misztal 2015: 2). In this sense 'normality' is not only the aspiration to regain certain kind of order after a disturbance but it is also about having a chance to have dreams and expectations fulfilled in the future that could not be met in the past (Misztal 2015: 2). Erving Goffman sees this aspiration for the future as immersed in the present. The present provides the context from where these desires arise. Misztal has pulled together Goffman's approach to this aspirational quality as follows:

> "If we follow Goffman's observation that normality also refers to an aspiration for the future, seen as always immersed in the present from which desires and ambitions originate, we can say that the notion of normality adds a descriptive component that allows us to understand what it is about our societies that is desirable, thereby establishing a crucial prescriptive ideal." (Misztal 2015: 2).

As well as its applicability to times of crisis, this aspirational element is particularly relevant in the case of post-communist countries striving towards becoming 'normal'. This falls in line with how the concept of 'normality' has been discussed in the context of Estonia, especially related to the understanding of what the country would have been had the Soviet occupation not taken place (see section 2.7). One could argue that the 'transition' paradigm applied in Estonia after 1991 was already by definition supposed to be temporary, a means to an aspirational end of a bright future – 'normality'. However, it ended up becoming a benchmark for 'normality' in itself as this thesis also demonstrates in Chapter 5

in relation to Estonia's response to the financial crisis. In this sense the aspiration did not just reflect the present reality, but it actively shaped it too.

These historical circumstances, the cultural and structural context, and the aspirational quality of 'normality' provide a very broad framework for addressing what is considered a 'normal' social order and one might ask what this concept has to offer that is not already addressed with the theoretical underpinnings of 'national identity' or social psychological approaches to (social) identity. So how does this common sense, taken for granted perception of a 'normal' political community come about? And how and why is it taken in by various groups?

2.3 GROUP IDENTITY AS PART OF 'NORMALITY'

It has been argued that people's judgements of 'normality' are related in fundamental ways to the classification of things (Misztal 2001: 316-317). That there is a basic need to 'normalise' aspects of life, be it in private or public, and even though the perceptions of 'normal' are continuously renegotiated, people try to maintain a sense of themselves as 'normal' (Misztal 2015: 8). Useful as this explanation is in a broad sense of why perceptions of 'normality', seen as a process, have resilience in the social world, a more nuanced account of why and how certain understandings of 'normality' develop on a group level will advance our insight into national identity constructions in Estonia.

This is where Henry Hale's sophisticated development of the concept of ethnicity is very useful. Even though his focus is on ethnicity, how he has unpacked the concept assists this research in drawing out the complex basis of how group identity can be approached and why it is useful to acknowledge the processes that lie underneath this in conducting social research. After an extensive discussion on the shortcomings and helpful advancements of the concept in existing theories on ethnicity and national identity from various fields in the social sciences including psychology, he posits that ethnicity is primarily about uncertainty reduction while ethnic politics is mainly about interests (Hale 2008: 33). According to his take, there are in fact no values inherently attached to ethnicity, and no such thing as

group interest *per se*. Rather ethnicity operates as a sort of a social radar that guides how people interpret the social world and pursue their interests. I argue here that groupness and, for the purposes of this thesis, nation as an imagined group or community, rests on a similar basis to the one Hale discusses in the case of ethnicity.

The core idea of uncertainty reduction coincides to a degree with the understanding that people's judgements of 'normality', a part of how they see themselves in the social world, are related in fundamental ways to the classification of things. While these 'classifications' can perhaps indicate more clear-cut divisions between categories, Hale (2008: 34) talks about *points of reference* as the main basis for identity construction:

> "Identity is the set of points of personal reference on which people rely to navigate the social world they inhabit, to make sense of the myriad constellations of social relationships that they encounter, to discern one's place in these constellations and to understand the opportunities for action in this context."

And through this, Hale defines *groups* by common relationships to these points of reference. Providing a basis for it from social psychology, he relies on Erik Erikson's idea that identity cannot be understood apart from the social world – that the interplay between the social and the psychological could only be seen as kind of psychosocial relativity (Hale 2008: 34). The world is too complex to survive without some means of simplifying and ordering it first. From this, Hale deduces that identity at its core is a means for reducing uncertainty and making sense of the social world in which to live and succeed (Hale 2008: 35). Relying on evidence from social psychology, he states that people tend to categorise themselves and others in ways that help make sense of the social world we live in and 'this facilitates recognition and response to both members and non-members of these categorizations' (Hale 2008: 35). The need for people to categorise ourselves into groups and group-oriented behaviour is based on psychological research (e.g. Social Identity Theory) and is seen here as one of the main categories for people to reduce uncertainty in the social world.

Hale also explains how the groups that people form tend to be based on at least some sense that they share a common fate (Hale 2008: 35). This common fate can

be based on any aspect of the social world, so in order for the categorisation to be meaningful and helpful in reducing complexity and uncertainty as Hale puts it, there are different levels of meaning attached to these categorisations: „Personal points of reference, groups, categorizations become 'thicker' when they come to have greater importance in people's lives, when people's lives are seen to be affected in more significant ways by the referent." (2008: 35).

Another question that arises here, is which certain 'thick' categorisations are activated while others remain more muted. In Hale's view this depends on the accessibility of the particular category and the fit between the category and observed reality. The reason why some categories are thicker than others is either intrinsically in the case of a common language, which could mean high transaction costs in interaction; impositional in a sense of what the broader social environment has placed on people; or usefulness as rules of thumb meaning that if a simpler social category frequently coincides with another, more complicated points of reference, which might be important for independent reasons, the more obvious ones can serve as rules of thumb for determining whether someone else belongs to a group defined by less detectable or more complicated traits (Hale 2008: 37). Looking at national identity, in how people group themselves and others into nations, can be seen as a simple category in the wider social world, it is this classification that can be argued to be used first and foremost for defining who belongs and who does not.

> "Points of personal reference, then, even group labels themselves, can become thick with meaning not only when the original referents become important in their own right, but also when they come to connote relationships to other referents seen to be correlated with the originals. At their most robust, these rules of thumb can involve whole patterns of recognition and can imply appropriate relational action to such extent that they can be fruitfully analyzed as cognitive schemas. Psychologists Hogg and Mullin find that identifying themselves strongly as group members, individuals are effectively replacing aspects of their own individuality (including their unshared attitudes and behaviors) with stereotypical beliefs, attitudes and/or behaviors. Likewise, categorizing others this way leads people to assume individuals in these other groups are much more similar than they actually are." (Hale 2008: 38).

As Hale points out, these simple perceptions can be powerful in determining how a person interprets the social situation and responds to it. Thick categorisations

are quite stable due to their pervasive availability and usefulness in various situation, but also due to the fact that some of the situations themselves are quite stable (Hale 2008: 40). However, research has shown that even if these thick categorisations help people navigate the social world, they can be discarded if they lose their uncertainty reducing value (Hale 2008: 40). This explanation gives a solid basis for understanding how certain categorisations within national identity are more stable than others and the complexity behind these points of reference.

Pulling together the various lines of discussion, 'normality' is used in this research as an ideational collection of thicker points of reference related to perceptions of national identity which are useful for the people in Estonia for navigating and reducing uncertainty in the social, economic and political world. The concept provides a very useful framework for looking at national identity constructions in Estonia. It helps uncover how the idea of becoming and being a 'normal' country again after regaining independence in 1991 has changed in the post-2004 context, which ostensibly signified becoming a 'normal' Western country again. Since 'normality' is looked at here in relation to national identity, then before engaging in analysing the empirical data gathered for this research, I will next bring out the theoretical premise for how national identity is approached here before discussing the previous academic literature on 'normality' relating more specifically to the Estonian context.

2.4 NATIONAL IDENTITY

As already stated, the idea of 'normality', which has been central to Estonia's nation-building context since 1991, is approached in this research in relation to national identity. The second part of this chapter explains the theoretical premise taken for understanding national identity in the case of Estonia by establishing how national identity is approached here and providing a theoretical framework for addressing 'normality' in the Estonian context.

During the past two decades, there has been little resistance in the academic community to the constructivist paradigm in researching national identity. The

constructivist approach to studying national identity is challenging for its underlying understanding that identity is a process and even with careful consideration of how this process is described there is a risk of reifying identity as something that 'exists'. Before delving into the constructivist approach and explaining the usefulness of this for the research at hand, I will briefly outline the main schools of thought for studying nationalism and national identity.

One of the older theories on nationalism comes from primordialists whose main argument lies in nation and nationalism being ancient and natural phenomena. They argue that nations and nationalism are based on deep rooted historical and cultural ties. Primordialists' approach can be regarded as one that sees nationalism as a natural and universal and can therefore be described as more or less essential. Approaches vary to a degree within the primordialist perspective from a purer sociobiological theory of Pierre van den Berghe which refers to genetics as the binding link for holding together a nation to the perceived cultural similarities from territory, kinship, language, and religion which have been the main constitutive elements for nationalism for such notable primordialists as Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz. Perennialists' accounts of the nation and nationalism do not differ to a significant degree from the primordialists' approach. The nations are seen as having existed over a very long time (as opposed to the modernist approach) and as based on non-rational psychological bonds, extended kinship or as 'expressions of premodern ethnic identity rooted in the remote past' (Smith 1998: 156-169).

Another approach to gaining a perspective into national identity is put forward by Anthony Smith and is termed ethno-symbolism. This approach places emphasis on understanding the roles of ethnic symbols, myths, memories, traditions and values in how the 'nation' is reinterpreted and rediscovered in the modern times. However, as Richard Mole (2012: 5) points out, Anthony Smith's claim that identity and symbols of the nation resonate with society below because of their underlying roots in pre-modern cultures fails to explain how members of civic nations feel a powerful identification with their national symbols.

Even though the debate regarding various approaches to studying national identity and whether the term should be utilised at all as a category of analysis (see

Brubaker 2000) is still ongoing, and Hale's account of ethnicity provides a solid contribution to this debate, there is general consensus in the academic community that national identity is best understood within the social constructivist paradigm which this research follows as well. This does not mean that the primordialist understanding of shared history, culture, kinship or even genetics do not contribute to the perceptions that people hold of their national identity. However, it is the ideas of the history, culture etc. that can vary among various groups and can contribute to the self-understandings of a nation. It is how these ideas are used by the elites from the top-down and taken in by people from the bottom-up which needs to be explored to understand the role these perceptions play in 'national identity' and through that in constructing 'normality' (see section 2.6 for further discussion on this).

The modernist approach, to which in broad strokes this research relies on as well, views nations as social constructions that were created by the socioeconomic and political changes during the 19th century with the birth of the contemporary nation state. The main theoretical premise used in this study, comes from Benedict Anderson (1983) who described nations as 'imagined political communities'. In this definition a nation is a community socially constructed, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. The community is imagined because, as he states, 'members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them but all of them possess an image of their communities' (Anderson 2000: 6). The nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson 2000: 7) and these shared perceptions of the political community, however complex and negotiable, constitute national identities – conceived as specific forms of social identities. National identity must therefore not be seen as something fixed but something that is constantly 'negotiated and renegotiated' (Mole 2012: 3). However, as explained earlier, the fundamental need for classification and reducing uncertainty in the social world also provides a solid ground for the relative stability in thicker perceptions of national identity.

2.5 THE OTHER IN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Considering the discussion above, defining the boundaries of an 'imagined political community' is not a straightforward task. As already mentioned, in the case of a state, who belongs can be simply looked at in terms of citizenship, but also in the more complex terms of who is included within the dominant narrative of national identity. The dominant narrative of national identity requires situating the nation-state relation to Others, placing it in time and space, and a multitude of various other elements which can vary according to context (see Chapters 5 and 6). Therefore, national identity has to be looked at as a relational concept as it is always constituted in relation to something else – the Other. One of the main tenets of Henry Tajfel's Social Identity Theory is that people tend to think and act in terms of groups so they can ascribe positive elements to their own group and accentuate negative ones in the Other group and through that raise their self-esteem. The latter is an important aspect and it has been argued that 'national identity is, fundamentally, a matter of dignity' (Greenfeld 1995 cited in Browning 2015: 199), which means that nationalism is driven by the community's desire to justify itself, legitimatise and possibly also enhance its position and standing (Browning 2015: 199). Self-esteem is related to how we view ourselves, which is here seen as contingent on how Others view us as well. As Browning notes, on a collective level, positive self-images are directed internally as well as externally and are dependent on the context (2015: 199). While the internal and external are seen as mutually contingent here, the self-image cannot exist without in being related to an Other.

Taking a step back to Social Identity Theory, I argue here that these negative traits are not necessarily the only Others that the Self may have. The positive Other, something to aspire to, works similarly in the process of identifying oneself as can be the case of Others 'simply being there' as Maria Mälksoo notes (2010: 9). Pille Petersoo has discussed the various Others in regard to nationalism and brings out that the idea of one significant negative and threatening Other in national identity is outdated and suggests looking at the multiple simultaneously existing Others, which are not necessarily negative, to understand these constructions (Petersoo 2007: 117). Since national identity is constantly negotiated and renegotiated, so are the Others and how they function in this process. The relational construction

of identity derives from the idea that the delineation of a Self from an Other is an active and ongoing part of identity construction and that the Self and Other also merge into one another (Neumann 1999: 35-36, for further discussion see Neumann 1999).

Based on this, not all values, traits, self-understandings in national identity are seen here as derived from the opposites. Estonia's national identity is seen as constructed, transformed and reinterpreted through the reflexion of several Others. Maria Mälksoo has also brought up the problems with simplifying the process of Othering in academic discussion and states that 'the assumed need for others in constructing oneself has, more often than not, led to the somewhat problematic deduction that constitutive difference between Self and Other inevitably translates into a behavioural relationship of Othering, be it in the form of representing the Other as an existential threat (securitisation), backward and inferior (practices of Orientalism), or simply different' (2010: 9). Although these practices are seen here to certainly form part of the Othering process, this study acknowledges that this relationship is more complex with various possible Others whose influence on the Self can vary over time (Petersoo 2007: 118). Therefore, it is important to assess this relationship between the Self and Other(s) dynamically, to fully appreciate these constructions.

Before proceeding, however, I will explain the two concepts introduced at this point in relation to Othering. Here, securitisation is not seen as always necessarily reaching the extent of existential threat. As Ole Wæver, who coined the term, defined it and how it is used in the research at hand, the process of securitisation places issues into the sphere of extraordinary politics or the politics of emergency, which would otherwise belong to the realm of normal everyday politics (1998: 26). The term is interesting in a sense that the baseline for perceptions of 'normal' everyday politics is not clear and in the case of Estonia, one could argue that the idea of 'normal' relations with Russia posited in the 1990s by Estonian politicians regarding 'normalisation' was part of the aspirational 'normality' of that time, and while in next two decades the political relations with Russia have certainly not 'normalised' in the sense put forward then, they have not reached the level of existential threat either. This relationship ought to be looked at more in terms of varying degrees of threat perception over time, but nevertheless, relations with

Russia cannot be seen as 'normal', as put forward in the 1990s from the point of view of the Estonian political elite, throughout that period. One might also question how extraordinary is politics that in a broad stroke has not changed all that much in two decades? The change, however, certainly came with Russia's illegal takeover of Crimea 2014 and the ongoing war in Donbass, which this research precedes.

The process of securitisation, as with other ideational processes discussed in this theoretical chapter, is not seen here as relying on a binary scale, but rather that there can be various degrees and layers how an issue becomes securitised in politics, and it does not have to be a conventional security issue as the Copenhagen School has discussed in more depth. Here, however, it is mostly used in examining the relationship with Russia to gain a better understanding of the 'normality' in the changed post-accession context.

The second concept Mälksoo refers to is Orientalism, which according to the original definition by Edward Said, is a particular Western style of defining, dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient that produces the alleged superiority and hegemony over the East (Said 2003: 3). This has been, and possibly still is, part of the Estonian identity construing process, since being labelled Eastern Europe within the West has been an integral part of how Estonia has tried to represent itself against these misrecognitions (see Mälksoo 2010). Here, however, the term is used not in the 'imperial' sense but rather as a means for how Estonia as part of the West is distinguished from the completely different, incomprehensible East. Considering the forced policies of the Soviet Union and lack of development in most areas of life, the Orientalising practices towards the Soviet successor state Russia can be viewed to coincide also with the perceptions of the 'abnormal' Soviet occupation discussed further in section 2.7 (also see Chapter 3, sections 3.2-3.4 for discussion on Russia as the Other and constructions of 'Europe').

To sum up, the Other then does not necessarily have to be a negative one to oppose, to oversimplify the matter, but a positive one to aspire to, and in general Others simply being there, can have an impact on self-identification for a state. In any case, since Othering is not something that exists in identity construction

and is looked at as a process within it, how certain ideational constructions of Others emerge, alter or disappear is dependent on the context. In terms of Estonia's national identity construction, the opposition to the 'abnormal' Soviet Union and its successor state Russia, has been established in previous studies (Rausing 2004; Berg and Ehin 2009; Petersoo 2007) and can be seen as a broader perception for an Other in Estonia's national identity construction.

Exploring what this Othering entails in the post-accession context will bring out the more complex nature of the process of Othering in national identity construction. The post-accession context also brings in a further Other – namely the Western community and Estonia's self-positioning in this after officially validating its return. This context provides an interesting case for researching the perceptions of the Others in Estonian national identity, and looking at whether, to what degree and how the process of Othering Russia and the Western community play a role in this construction.

2.6 HOW TO RESEARCH NATIONAL IDENTITY?

Now that I've established *why* national identities are constructed, and the main premise for understanding the constructivist approach to national identity, it is necessary to take a closer look at *how* national identities are constructed and therefore how they should best be studied.

As already explained in detail, this project follows a similar line to previous research on identity, claiming that there is no such thing as a single national identity in an essentialising sense but that identities are socially constructed. As the word 'socially' already indicates, communication plays a key role in the construction process. National identities are seen here as discursively 'produced, reproduced, transformed and destructed' through language and semiotics (De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak 1999: 153). This means that there are no *inherent* characteristics of Estonian national identity to bring out: 'rather that different identities are discursively constructed according to context that is, according to the social field, the situational setting of the discursive act and the topic being

discussed' (De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak 1999: 154). De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999: 154) assume that 'there are certain relations (of transfer and contradiction) between the images of identity offered by political elites or the media and 'everyday discourses' about nations and national identities', and this is also a basis for how national identity is approached here.

The idea of an imagined political community is seen to be realised through beliefs and practices, and these are conditioned by people of influence (e.g. politicians and intellectuals) and systems of communication (media, education, etc.) (De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak 1999: 153). The role that elites play in constructing nations and national identities cannot be overlooked in the constructivist approach. Constructivists view nations and national identities as constructs forged by elites to achieve various socio-political and economic objectives (Mole 2012: 3). However, as Mole points out, emphasising the role of the elites in constructing national identity leaves unanswered the question about why and how people accept the top-down constructions of national identity. Furthermore, if identities are constructed, the question arises as to how social groups become treated as real and with the potential for political agency? (Mole 2012: 5). In this sense, the main constructivist argument that emphasises the role of the elites in constructing national identities has some explanatory power in analysing and understanding how perceptions of national identity are constructed, but they are also conditioned by the existing understandings of 'normality' in the society.

Richard Mole (2012) looks at the discursive constructions of national identity as a source of political power in more detail. Mole argues that identity has become the object of political manipulation, with elites using a range of means to attach precise meanings to floating signifiers such as 'nation,' 'state,' and 'territory' and, at the same time, convey the idea of shared identity (2012: 18). He explains how and why the grand discourse of nationalism has developed and based on Ernesto Laclau's and Chantalle Mouffe's Discourse Theory, which posits that all social and political action takes place within a historically situated discourse, he demonstrates that while discourses have to be flexible to accommodate to changes on the ground, they cannot be seen as infinitely elastic either (Mole 2012: 15). If the discourse no longer represents or explains specific events, it is *dislocated* [original emphasis] and this allows for a reconfiguration of it by the

political elite resulting in a new common sense (Mole 2012: 15). This clarification of the role of discourse helps us understand how changes in the constructions of 'normality' happen and while the main emphasis is placed on the political elite here, their action is 'conditioned and constrained by contingent hegemonic discourses and truth and value regimes, which determine what may be considered true or false, good or bad, rational or irrational, legitimate or illegitimate' (Mole 2012: 15). This has to be taken into account to understand the process of any change in perceptions of national identity and 'normality' in general.

This also falls in line with Rogers Brubaker's performative understanding by which 'groupness' is constructed within discursive social fields and that nation or national identity has to be studied from various sides within these fields to capture how people construct and are framed in their everyday perceptions by national identity:

> "Ethnicity and nationalism could best be understood if studied from below as well as above, in microanalytic as well as macroanalytic perspective. From a distance it is all too easy to "see" bounded and homogenous ethnic and national groups, to whom common interests, perceptions, intentions and volition can be attributed. Up close, on the other hand, one risks losing sight of the larger contexts that shape experience and interaction. The study of large- and mid-scale structures and processes remains indispensible, but I came to believe that it must be complimented by research pitched at a level close to everyday experience if one is to avoid unwarranted assumptions of "groupness" and capture the way ethnicity actually 'works'." (Brubaker 2006: xiv).

Exploring this relationship between top-down and ground-up is one of the central aims and contributions of this thesis. This research seeks to explore the constructions of Estonian national identity by focusing on the perspective from below, but also incorporating the view from above. This means that while it acknowledges the role elites have in the construction of national identity, these constructions have to also to a degree 'meet an inherent need for meaning and self-esteem in the population below' (Mole 2012: 6). The images used for conducting the interviews reflect the dominant elite discourse in Estonia and provide for a very useful way of examining this relationship as demonstrated in Chapter 4 and the empirical chapters 5, 6 and 7.

This approach will enable us to understand how Estonian identity is perceived and how Estonian inhabitants, both Estonian- and Russian-speaking, negotiate and renegotiate the categories of national identity. If political choices and decisions are made based on this shared understanding of rules and norms, then providing a more nuanced account of these shared understandings can add a useful insight into the processes of decision-making. In line with the social constructivist approach, the aim here is not to achieve an objective reality but to uncover a range of simultaneously existing identity constructs. Looking into how understandings of Estonian national identity have developed and how these constructions affect the everyday lives of the respondents, a better understanding of the various perspectives on social and political realities is achieved.

2.7 RE-CONSTRUCTING 'NORMALITY' IN ESTONIA

Terms like 'normalisation' and 'normal politics' have surfaced in various accounts dealing with Estonian identity politics (see Mälksoo 2006, Berg and Ehin 2009 etc.), but an overarching idea of 'normality' in the post-Soviet context has been discussed in more depth by two researchers, whose works also guide the direction of this study. These are the works by Daina Stukuls Eglitis 'Imagining the Nation: History, Modernity and Revolution in Latvia' (2002) applicable also in the case of Estonia and Sigrid Rausing's 'History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia: The End of a Collective Farm' (2004), which are taken as a basis here for discussing what the idea of 'normality' entailed in the Estonian post-communist context prior to accession to the Western structures in 2004.

Eglitis utilises the term 'normality' to demonstrate the already discussed 'commonsense' quality in the concept in addressing the late Soviet and early post-Soviet era in people's perception of society, state and economics in the Baltic States. She brings out a useful definition from Ann Swidler of common sense as 'the set of assumptions so unselfconscious as to seem natural, transparent, undeniable, part of the structure of the world' (2002: 13), which helps to understand the gap the Baltic populations' perceived between what was forced

upon them with the Soviet Communist ideology and the 'common sense' about what the state was supposed to be.

Related to the aspirational quality of 'normality', Eglitis discusses how the 'normal' world order remained to be reconstructed after the fall of the communist regime in the Baltic States and that 'normality' was an ideological structure which developed largely in opposition to the putative 'abnormality' of the Soviet regime (Eglitis 2002: 7). She points out how there was not a particular ideological model for the construction of society in the wake of the death of the old order, aside from the often-repeated but vague aspirations for an open society, democracy, markets, civil society, and, more generally, 'normality' (Eglitis 2002: 7). Part of the challenge of a post-communist society, was not just to realise the institution of a new social order but to construct models of what that social order should be and to endow that social order with meaning (Eglitis 2002: 7). In other words, to 'normalise' the social order. This widely shared desire for 'normality' contributed to the construction of a unified opposition to the 'abnormal Otherness' of the USSR projected onto Russia after August 1991, and also advanced the contests over how a post-Communist state and society should be imagined and reconstructed (Eglitis 2002: 8). The idea of 'normality' therefore played a central role in how the national identity narrative was established after regaining independence.

Rausing also provides a very useful account of 'normality' in post-Soviet Estonia claiming that 'normal' meant not only what Estonia was seen to be at the time, but what it would have been had the Soviet occupation not taken place (Rausing 2004: 37). The aspirational quality of 'normality' is a central aspect here. At the time when Rausing conducted her research (1993-1994), which focused on one particular locality in Estonia (Noarootsi), she argues that the 'normal' was a form of cultural narrative that in fact expressed the lack of 'normality' of Estonians' lives.

This related both to their Soviet past and the discomfort of their own recent realisation that they were not 'normal' in relation to the West (Rausing 2004: 37). In the 1990s people did not see themselves as authentically Western, and hence 'normal' (Rausing 2004: 37). Rausing (2004: 39) claims that 'cultural knowledge

about the West therefore came to be defined as 'normal' and was widely understood as the logical extension of a core, or an essence, of Estonianness' – and this was imagined as natural rather than cultural.

The construction of 'normal' in Estonia pre-dated independence from the Soviet Union and functioned as a means of distinction not only from the Russians but also from the Soviet Union itself (Rausing 2004: 40). Not only was the regime illegal and illegitimate, it was also a fundamental deviation from what was perceived to be the normal course of national, state, social and economic development (Eglitis 2002: 12). Sigrid Rausing reiterates Eglitis' point by claiming that 'the Estonians, however poor and underprivileged they felt in relation to the West, seemed to have no doubts that they could change and leave the Soviet culture and way of life comfortably behind in order to assume their [perceived] natural place in the West' (Rausing 2004: 40).

Rausing also discusses (2004: 40), perhaps somewhat simplistically, how as a nation, Estonians knew exactly what they would have been like if the situation had been 'normal' and thus what they wanted to become. Westernness as Americanness was not it, since it was regarded more as cultureless and the Estonians were moving away from the Soviet mode of living towards a Finnish, Swedish and German cultural sphere (Rausing 2004: 40). An earlier point regarding 'normality' being how people see and interpret their particular historical circumstances delimited by the cultural repertoires and structural context provides a broad explanation for this approach, given Estonia's historical ties to Germans and Swedes, and the linguistic, cultural and also geographical closeness to Finland, which had had the chance to develop in the Western world while Estonia was occupied by the 'abnormal' Soviet rule.

The Northern European identity (see further in section 3.5) became an important element in Estonia's 'return to the West' and this was seen as representing Estonians' own inner core, which had been denied its 'natural' and 'normal' expression and development during the Soviet order (Rausing 2004: 38). Rausing also makes an interesting point in how Estonia's process of change – the strive to become a 'normal' country – differed from the Russian process, since Estonia was

not only moving from one system to another but also from one geographical realm of belonging to another (Rausing 2004: 40).

Eglitis sees a somewhat more varied picture as to the broad direction Latvia was supposed to be headed in the immediate post-Soviet context. She argues that some considered the restoration of pre-Soviet social order as the desired 'normality', others preferred to model the future not on the past but on the modern West, seeing the country becoming like Western Europe as the desired goal (Eglitis 2002: 8). As the Soviet reality differed from both perspectives, the 'normal' during the Soviet era was the unfamiliar while the 'not normal' had become the familiar (Rausing 2004: 37). The aspirational quality of 'normality' is therefore of particular importance in framing perceptions of the social world in the 1990s Estonia. The question then becomes, what, if anything, is aspired to in the Estonian in today's context?

There is a multiplicity of understandings attached to Eglitis' concept of 'normality' and the term itself is referred to as rather a background knowledge or shared relationship to points of reference as discussed earlier that people in the Baltic States had during the era of change. While the previous paragraphs discuss how people in Estonia appeared to have quite a clear understanding that their 'normality' entailed belonging to 'Europe' after half a century of occupied rule, looking more closely into what this idea of 'Europe' entailed is, however, not as straightforward as it might appear. As Eglitis has pointed out the 'European normality' to which the Baltic countries were returning to was itself an indistinct and contested construct, with different narratives of Europeanness placing differing degrees of emphasis on spatial and temporal components. The latter aspect has become even more relevant since 2004, in ways few could have anticipated in the 1990s, when entering the EU and NATO was presented as a panacea in Estonia. Recognising that 'Europe' itself is a contested construct is an important point for understanding how the perceptions of Europe and Estonia's place within them inherently belong to the process of constructing Estonian 'normality' and a separate section (3.4) in this literature review will explore the idea of 'returning to Europe' further.

Eglitis has provided a useful analytical model for defining 'normality', which pulls together the discussion above. Her model for looking at 'normality' through *spatial* and *temporal* narrative constructions is useful in understanding the thick points of reference for how national belonging was perceived by people in Estonia. The interplay of spatial, with emphasis on the 'West' as a natural place of belonging and themes of democracy and economic prosperity; and temporal as glorification of the inter-war period, national freedom and cultural development narratives over time was a useful analytical framework for addressing Latvia's self-positioning at that time (Eglitis 2002) and works similarly in the case of Estonia. The spatial and temporal dimensions are linked in the sense that the inter-war Baltic States were remembered as successful European states which – had they not given way to Soviet 'abnormality' - would have shared in the post-war prosperity of the 'West'. Independence was supposed to set Estonia back on this course, but the image of the 'West' as synonymous with eternal economic prosperity and progress has since been called into question by the economic crisis and the fallout from it. Having gained full membership in the European Union, validating the 'return to Europe' and with NATO securing its eastern border for more than a decade already, the changing perceptions of society, state and especially economics deserve another careful examination.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter establishes the theoretical grounds for why and how 'normality' and national identity are approached and analysed in the study at hand. 'Normality' is broadly addressed as the common sense and taken for granted situations in the social world which usually don't get noticed by the people living it. 'Normality' can help us understand the frames in which people see and interpret their particular historical circumstances and what they find desirable about their society, limited by the cultural and structural context they inhabit.

The theoretical premise for understanding identity and groupness relies on Henry Hale's account of ethnicity, which he sees as being mainly about uncertainty reduction in a complex social world. Identity is defined as a set of points of

reference which help categorise and navigate the world around us and groups are formed by having common relationships to points of reference. Pulling the broader theoretical discussion together, 'normality' is used in this research as an ideational collection of thicker point of references related to perceptions of national identity which are useful for the people in Estonia for navigating and reducing uncertainty in the social, economic and political world.

The chapter then narrows down to how national identity is approached within the social constructivist paradigm. Following Benedict Anderson's famous definition of the nation as 'an imagined political community', national identity is not seen as something fixed or in an essentialising sense, but rather as discursively produced and reproduced by means of language and constantly negotiated and renegotiated. In order to understand these constructions of national identity one needs to study the discursive fields from 'below as well as above'.

Finally, the specific Estonian post-Soviet but pre-accession 'normality' central to narratives of Estonia's national identity is discussed through the works of Eglitis and Rausing. One of the core points of reference for 'normality' in Estonia was opposition to the 'abnormal' Soviet rule. 'Normality' was largely based on the idea of what Estonia would have been like had the Soviet occupation not taken place. The spatial – belonging to the Western world – and the temporal – glorification of the inter-war era of independence – became the pillars for identity construction for Estonia after regaining independence in 1991.

The concept of 'normality' provides a very useful framework for looking at national identity constructions in Estonia. It helps uncover the main agenda for this research as to how the idea of becoming and being a 'normal' country again after regaining independence in 1991 has changed in the post-2004 context, which ostensibly signified becoming a 'normal' Western country. Joining the EU and NATO in 2004 accession has certainly had an impact on the dominant set of ideas which shape the policy-making process and Estonia's self-positioning within the international arena. The question is, what does a 'normal' European state look like today and has Estonia finally 'returned' to being one?

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the academic literature on Estonian national identity and positions this study within it. Estonian national identity, in relation to which 'normality' is looked at here, has been studied in a variety of ways and there is a large amount of research out there that touches in one way or another on this complex topic. The literature review is structured in order to provide a background for the current study and to demonstrate its value, especially in terms of methodological significance. Since the main argument of this thesis relies on the idea of Estonia having acquired a certain 'normality' within a decade of belonging to Europe, this chapter looks more closely at the various overarching themes on 'normality' in Estonia, discussed at the end of the theory chapter (section 2.7), that have surfaced in prior research concerning Estonian national identity.

The aim here is to offer a contextualisation of Estonian national identity within the existing academic literature. The key themes arising from the previous literature provide the groundwork for this research. The first section discusses the conflicting history narratives in the academic literature as a basis for Russia as the Other in Estonian identity constructions. After exploring the relationship with Russia, I will look at the previous studies related to Estonia and Europe, along with the temporal and spatial constructions of 'returning to Europe' which then leads into an overview of a few sub-themes and labels attached to Estonia's self-positioning and identity constructions. This is then accompanied by an examination of the economic issues and a discussion on the neoliberal paradigm in Estonia, which, as brought out already in Chapter 1, have played a significant

role in the national narrative since regaining independence in 1991. These main themes are viewed here as thicker points of reference for Estonian national identity construction and form the basis for my data collection as I used them guide the selection of images used for the purposes of interviews (which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4).

As one might expect, there has been a significant amount of research on Estonian politics and identity contributing to the academic literature in the pre-accession period. This topic was of particular interest to scholars following the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore the volume of research has somewhat decreased in recent times. However, the ethnographic and bottom-up perspective has remained relatively neglected throughout, as discussed below, even though recent research has called for this (see Polese, Morris, Pawłusz and Seliverstova 2018).

A comprehensive account of how national identity narratives frame the policy choices in the Baltic States from the beginning of the 1990s to EU accession is Richard Mole's (2012) book 'The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, Discourse and Power in the Post-Communist Transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania'. The very useful theoretical premise of this book on discourse analysis and its relation to understanding national identity was discussed briefly already in Chapter 2. While Mole acknowledges that national identity constructions are also conditioned by the existing understandings in the society, this research takes a more bottom-up approach to uncovering the national identity constructions in Estonia and chronologically picks up from where Mole left off to address the post-EU period.

As to the limited ethnographic research mentioned above, a very useful recent edition by Abel Polese, Jeremy Morris, Emilia Pawłusz and Oleksandra Seliverstova (2018) 'Identity and Nation Building in Everyday Post-Socialist Life' brings forward the value of bottom-up approach for gaining insights into identity and nation-building in the post-socialist life. The authors in this edition argue for and look at everyday practices as a meaningful and useful site for looking at the process of identity formation, an approach this study takes on as well albeit in a slightly different perspective. The main emphasis of their work is on the 'banal' practices

(see Billig 1995) related to consumption, kinship, mobility, music, use of objects and artefacts (p. 2).

The research conducted by the number of authors is what the editors of the book deem 'micro' or the bottom-up look into the everyday which allows for a deeper look into the official and unofficial national, ethnic and civic categorisations cut across everyday practices is a useful addition to the academic literature on also Estonian national identity with two chapters dedicated to it. Exploring some of these everyday practices in Estonia, Emilia Pawłusz looks at Estonian identity through music and looks at the case of a folk metal band in order to better understand popular music as part of nation-building. She also brings out that while Estonia known for its singing festivals and choral music, nationally themed songs are not limited only to this and themes of nationalism also belong to the sphere of popular music. Her main point by looking at a case of a heavy metal band, is to demonstrate how 'ordinary citizens have the agency to (re)create ideas of what it means to belong to the nation' (p. 47) and that this process of belonging to a nation is mediated every day in informal ways. Another chapter on Estonia in this edition by Seliverstova discusses the consumer practices as part of constructing national identity. She looks into food consumer culture in Estonia to again demonstrate the 'everyday' expressions and enactments of national belonging for different ethnic groups. Through her bottom-up research she claims that although because of different factors, the representatives of ethnic groups fail to recognise that they already have a large amount of overlapping identity markers. The consumer practices in Estonia as part of identity have been also addressed by Vihalemm and Keller (2011) and Kalmus, Keller and Kiise (2009).

Michael Billig's (1995) famous take on 'banal nationalism' states that nationalism is not just about 'hot' conflicts happening 'somewhere else', but that nationalism is everywhere and constantly socially reproduced through symbols and everyday mundane practices. The focus of this research is somewhat different, as it does not look into these ideological everyday practices of nationalism but rather at 'normality' and its role in nation-building. In other words, it explores how dominant top-down discourses of spatial and temporal 'normality' (and associated practices of defining the Self and the Other) are received, negotiated and reproduced at the everyday level, in a context where 'normality' as originally

constructed at the start of the 1990s had ostensibly been attained and 'normality' itself was thus especially open to redefinition and reinvention. In this way, I provide a fuller picture of the dominant discursive formations that sit at the heart of Estonian 'national identity', uncovering their most important shared components and shedding further light on the overall construction of Estonian national identity.

As discussed more thoroughly in the theory chapter (section 2.7), Sigrid Rausing (2009) has also brought forward the changing aspects of everyday life and a deeper sense of identity on a former collective farm in Estonia through ethnographic methods. However, as noted above, this research was limited in scope and conducted in the early 1990s. Given the significant changes that have taken place in Estonia over the last two decades discussed in Chapter 1, it is high time to revisit exploring Estonian 'normality' through a bottom-up approach in a post-EU context.

3.2 RUSSIA AS THE OTHER - NARRATIVES OF HISTORY

As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of 'normality' can help us understand theoretically the frames in which people see and interpret their particular historical circumstances. The historical circumstances in the case of Estonia frame the present national identity construction process on various and complex levels, but as has been pointed out, the conflicting history narratives with Russia is a pillar of Estonian national identity construction. The constructions of Russia as the Other in Estonia's identity-building process heavily related to the conflicting narratives of history emerge as the underlying themes which have framed Estonia's identity construction, and this topic has received its fair share of scholarly attention.

One of the earlier significant engagements with identity politics in the region is an edited volume by Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin titled 'Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration' (2009). Adopting a constructivist approach, Berg and Ehin claim that the poor relations between

Estonia and Russia can be explained by the fact that the national identity constructions of the Baltic States and Russia, together with the historical narratives they are based on, are incompatible and indeed antagonistic (Berg and Ehin 2009: 9). The multi-causal analysis presented in the volume relies on perspectives from prominent scholars (Morozov and Fofanova; Mälksoo; Brüggemann and Kasekamp etc.) studying identity and historical narratives of the Baltic States, several of whom will receive separate attention here. While these scholars try to uncover the reasons for the failure to 'normalise' relations, this thesis argues that the identity-shaped discursive construction of Estonian-Russian relations has become a part of Estonia's post-accession 'normality' in its own right. In a word, Othering of Russia has become constitutive of an Estonian Self, which has persisted even after the ostensible reason for Othering Russia in the first place i.e. with joining the EU and NATO disappeared.

Before delving into the conflicting history narratives, it is important to expand somewhat on the *temporal* construction within the Estonian 'normality'. As briefly pointed out in the Chapters 1 and 2, Estonian national identity is rooted in the idea of restoration of its sovereign statehood after the Soviet occupation that lasted from 1940 up to 1991 (Berg and Ehin 2009: 27). David J. Smith argues that the 22-year experience of Estonian independence (1918-1940) between the two world wars has played a crucial role in shaping discourses on national identity during and after the restoration of independence (Smith 2003a: 161). The narrative of 'state restorationism' lay on the notion that the Soviet-imposed communism never took 'significant root' after 1940 among an ethnic Estonian population that had so recently experienced an 'alternative, non-Soviet and self-determined national existence' (Vardys 1975, cited in Smith 2003a: 161). The nation-statehood of 1918-1940 was represented as European 'normality', as opposed to the 'abnormal' Soviet reality (see Eglitis 2002). It therefore becomes rather clear that the identity construction of the titular nation did not simply derive from the 1980s opposition to Soviet nationalities policy but refers to an earlier independence period of 1918-1940 (Aalto 2003: 574). This does not only apply to the temporal aspect of 'normality' but also the *spatial* elements. Having experienced independence in the interwar Europe, it was this 'normal' Europe, which was seen as the desired goal also spatially in the 1990s. The prior experience of statehood as also a spatial point of reference became part of the national

narrative in the context where goal was attaining and guaranteeing full national sovereignty.

Put in a nutshell, the restorationist vision was more compelling to the Estonian national movement and its leaders than the notion of a post-Soviet 'third republic' that would recognise and thereby legitimise the new social realities left behind by Soviet rule. However, Russia's denial of Soviet Union's occupation of the Baltic States, and through that their 'rightful' place in Europe, and these contradictory narratives form a constitutive pillar in Estonian (and Latvian and Lithuanian) 'normality' in relation to national identity constructions (see Mälksoo 2009; Morozov 2003, 2005).

These contradictory historical narratives Estonian and Russian identities are based upon did not disappear once the Baltic States joined the EU and NATO. Indeed, this process of joining the Western structures arguably amplified the Russian narrative, meaning that politics of memory quickly became the defining feature of the post-2004 period as far as the relationship with Russia (and by extension with the EU) was concerned. These contradictory history narratives have been incorporated into the works of Andres Kasekamp and Karsten Brüggemann (2009; Brüggemann 2007), Vyacheslav Morozov (2003; 2005) and the 'politics of memory' relating to the historical narrative in Estonia is extensively researched by Eva-Clarita Onken (2007; 2009; also see Pettai 2011), who also, along with Siobhan Kattago (2012), lays bare the different 'memory regimes' that operate in Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and Russia.

The 'memory wars' (Kasekamp and Brüggemann 2008) between Estonia and Russia are directly related to the conflicting collective memories and are a more complex social and political phenomena when looked at in more detail. Conflicting collective memories can lead to a situation where national identities are seen to be under threat and therefore securitised by the political elite (Pääbo 2008: 7). Within these memories, the commemorative activities play a crucial role, since 'to remember a past event that is considered important for the community or the state' (Onken 2007:23). Memorials and commemoration days can facilitate social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and provide an opportunity for

demonstrating political positions and different perceptive standpoints (Onken 2007: 23-24).

Eva-Clarita Onken, who has written extensively on the topic (2007; 2009; Pettai 2011), covers the 2005 Moscow commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II as an example of this and reveals the many levels on which European memory politics is based by looking at the decision-making process of the presidents of the Baltic States on whether to accept the invitation (Onken 2007: 24). A 'normal' Europe for Estonia is seen as one that takes on board the Baltic narrative with regard to the Second World War and the Soviet Union, at a time when Russia was assertively pushing its own narrative on these. Kasekamp and Brüggemann (2009) discuss the much-debated Bronze soldier incident in Tallinn in 2007 in terms of commemoration and 'war of monuments'. David J. Smith (2008: 424) demonstrates how this 'war of monuments' started in 2004 with the erection of a monument by Estonian nationalists to Estonian 'men who fought in 1940–1945 against Bolshevism and for the restoration of Estonian independence' and which the Estonian government ordered to be removed, which ended in clashes with local residents. As he demonstrates, the following discursive conflict between Estonia and Russia and the 2005 Moscow commemoration event focused attention on the 'Bronze Soldier' as a continued locus for commemoration in Tallinn. In this changed context 2005–2006, this monument was 're-Sovietized' in that 'it ceased to be a simple memorial to the dead and was again politicised as a symbol of occupation/liberation' (Smith 2008: 426).

A series of events surrounding the removal of the Bronze Soldier, a Soviet era Second World War monument in the centre of Tallinn have been discussed in length (see Ehala 2009) and will not be reiterated here in such detail. The removal of the Bronze Soldier located in the centre of Tallinn on April 27, 2007 sparked widespread protests in Estonia and caught international attention. Russia's response to the crisis – with the misrepresentations of events by the state controlled Russian media, cyber-attacks on Estonian websites and a blockade of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow by the Russian youth organisation Nashi for a week, further exacerbated the issue (Smith 2008: 426). The statue was re-located in the military cemetery in Tallinn and has not been a source of such controversy since. However, in domestic terms, as David Smith notes, while the immediate

effect appeared to polarise the society, there were indications already then that 'the profound sense of shock engendered by the nights of violence in April 2007 has served to engender a more meaningful public debate over how to resolve the continued challenges of 'multicultural integration'' (Smith 2008: 426). But what kind of an impact had this debate had by 2013? In so far as continued Othering of Russia is part of post-2004 'normality', what then are the implications for constructions of 'normality' in the domestic sphere, given the presence of a large Russian-speaking population? These complex perceptions among people in Estonia regarding these events and their possible wider implications is one of the topics explored in this study as well (see Chapter 7).

The 2005 Moscow commemoration event and the 2007 Bronze Soldier incident are also used as an empirical example in Maria Mälksoo's book 'The Politics of Becoming European: A study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold War security imaginaries' (2010) based on her PhD thesis where she seeks to demonstrate how memory politics in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland is used to push for their narrative of the events of the Second World War in an attempt to be recognised as part of Europe the way they have always depicted themselves to be. Another addition to the relatively extensive list of academic research focusing on memory politics in the region is 'Memory and Pluralism in the Baltic States' edited by Eva-Clarita Pettai (2011) where a further element of this debate is brought in by Wulf and Grönholm who look at the role of historians in generating meaning in Estonia.

The so-called 'war of monuments' has also been incorporated into Jörg Hackmann and Marko Lehti's edited volume 'Contested and Shared Places of Memory: History and Politics in North Eastern Europe' (2010) where the removal of the German-uniformed monument at Lihula in 2004 and the relocation of the red army monument in Tallinn in 2007 sparked an extensive discussion and contextualisation by David J. Smith, Siobhan Kattago and Marko Lehti and others. They demonstrate the importance of war monuments and contested past as part of memory politics and identity, especially in a divided society such as Estonia.

The presentation of history is interwoven in the core concepts of national identity, like state and nation. As stated, while the Baltics and the international community view the annexation of the republics to the Soviet Union as an illegal occupation,

Russia denies the illegality of it and in this sense views the occupation as voluntary incorporation into the Soviet Union. This gap in historical narratives creates the divisions in perceptions with the 'West' and is one of the main sources of Russia's drift in the anti-Western direction (Fofanova and Morozov 2009: 26). And the deterioration of relations with the West includes deterioration of relations with Estonia as a subset. The 'domestic politics of memory' (for further on this see Onken 2007) of prior independent statehood and nationalities policy of the occupational era constitute a crucial starting point for 'them' *versus* 'us' identity construction, which is not merely an external boundary but cuts across Estonia's society.

The explicit engagement with history is a striking feature in the identity politics in the former Soviet republics. In all cases, but especially here, the 'temporal' and the 'spatial' cannot be so easily distinguished or disentangled. Contrasting ideologies and cultural geographies as Estonia's escape from Russia play an important role in the pattern of self-narration (Darieva and Kaschuba 2007: 22). Estonian elites are striving to reject the old, canonised borders of a limited definition of 'Estonia' and aim to find new frames for identification in geographical, historical or intellectual 'spaces' (Brüggemann 2007: 147). It is not surprising, in that sense, that Estonia, after being largely conceived as part of the East in Western Europe and as 'our West' within the Soviet Union, tried discursively to become part of the Scandinavian North at the end of the 1990s (Darieva and Kaschuba 2007: 22). This is a part of perceptions of 'spatial normality' at the time, which, as the analysis here shows, is still relevant in ideationally placing Estonia in the post-accession perspective, albeit in an adjusted manner given the changed context.

The conflicting narratives surrounding the erection and relocation of monuments in 2004 and 2007 offer a fascinating example of the role history narratives play in Estonia-Russia bilateral relations as well as in the broader international scene (Kasekamp and Brüggemann 2009: 51). Estonia's 'new identity' had become more than just 'escaping the East'. Rather, Brüggemann coins the desired perception of being seen as a victim of history as 'an escape from history' (2007: 153). He states that Estonian everyday politics places Estonia as either being a country of contact between the East and the West or as a country located at the eastern edge of

Western security structures (Brüggemann 2007: 153), also referred to as the 'liminal' character of Estonia (see Mälksoo 2010). For Estonia, becoming part of the West also meant becoming its eastern frontier (Brüggemann 2007: 144). Additionally, the hard securitised border with Russia has remained post-EU and NATO enlargement, giving basis for continuation of a threatened border state narrative which was important for purposes of domestic political legitimation.

Complementing this, Darieva and Kaschuba's edited volume 'Representations on the Margins of Europe: Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States' (2007), focuses on how different identity strategies, arguments of history, and figurative sights of collective remembering are constructed and represented in an attempt to balance the contradictory logics of local identity politics and 'becoming European' in South Caucasia and Baltic States (Darieva and Kaschuba 2007: 12). This is a rare and solid addition to the ethnographic approach in understanding identity politics in the Baltic and South Caucasus. Even though the emphasis and most of the ethnographic work is conducted in Armenia, they have brought to bear how much an in-depth investigation into people's perceptions can contribute to our understanding of the 'margins' of Europe.

While most of the studies focusing on Estonia's identity-building process and its relation to Russia and history have done so by examining the dominant discourses, media outlets, archives and survey results and emphasis has been placed on the elites, there remain only a limited few ethnographic or grassroots level works out there.

An important contribution to the ethnographic research in identity studies in Estonia was the study done by David J. Smith and Stuart Burch in Narva in 2006-2008 (2012). By utilising an ethnographic approach to the case and addressing a wide range of identity markers in Estonia, they received a more complex perspective of the city's identity politics than commonly put forward in the literature. The results pointed more to hybridity rather than nationality as the defining characteristic of identity politics within the city. This research has been influenced by their methodological approach as they used photo elicitation in uncovering the complex identity constructions on the ground in Narva.

There is little denying that memory politics forms a significant part of Estonia's identity constructions and this is constantly accentuated in the dominant discourse, the media, politicians etc. However, these studies focus mostly on how the Second World War and the Soviet era has influenced Estonia after joining the EU and leave the present-day people in Estonia and their idea of national identity largely unexplored.

3.3 CONTEXTUALISING RUSSIA AS THE OTHER

The theoretical underpinnings of this research and identity construction were discussed in the previous chapter, and the relevance of Others in Estonian national identity construction clearly outlined. It is therefore not surprising that the focus in academic research thus far has been on the threatening qualities of Russia as the Other in understanding Estonian identity and a lot of emphasis placed on the contradicting history narratives discussed in the previous section. Indeed, issues of security have not lost their relevance for present day research focusing on Estonia's relations with its Eastern neighbour.

Fofanova and Morozov have argued that while Russia's identity had been developed in the civic direction, with the Russian nation being imagined as a political community including all citizens of Russia, this same civic nationalism presupposes a clear-cut differentiation between those who belong and those who do not (2009: 22). However, Vladimir Putin's regime moved this idea of statism towards ethnic nationalism, to oversimplify this complex issue. As Taras Kuzio (2015: 165) notes, Vladimir Putin's nation-building policies promoted 'an alternative neo-Soviet, ethnic and imperial-Great Power' national identity, which has also become a basis for Putin's very high approval ratings. Emil Pain (2016) reiterates a similar point with his term of 'imperial nationalism' indicating a balancing act between acknowledging the leading role of the ethnic Russians in the Russian state, while at the same time emphasising perceptions of Russia as a great power to keep the multi-ethnic country together. The scope of this research does not allow for a more thorough examination of the issue, but this 'imperial nationalism' includes direct policy efforts to include Russian-speakers in the post-

Soviet space and also elsewhere. Agnia Grigas (2016: 10) has listed Russia's 'reimperialisation' policy trajectory towards Russians living in the territory of the former Soviet Union as soft power, humanitarian policies, compatriot policies, information warfare, offering passports, protection by military means, and annexation. Some of these hostile policies which have been directed towards Russian-speakers in Estonia to keep them in its 'sphere of influence' create grounds for the securitisation of relationship with Russia.

Putin's Russia defined itself as not only the legal successor, but also the geopolitical heir of the Soviet Union, and this concept of continuer-state lies at the core of national identity and its attempt to (re)establish itself as a great power (Fofanova and Morozov 2009: 26). History most certainly did not end with the accession to EU and NATO, because the Russian Federation has mentally still not accepted that the Baltic States are no longer in its sphere of influence (Brüggemann 2007: 142). However, again, this topic has not been explored from a bottom-up standpoint. Even though this research is conducted pre-2014, and the current situation in which populism and Euroscepticism are on the rise across Europe and official Russian discourses are finding an ever broader reception, this situation makes it all the more timely and important to understand the perspectives of 'ordinary people'. Uncovering how ordinary people think about the relationship with Russia in a post-EU context provides a useful addition not only to the academic literature but to broader debates. The same is equally if not more true with regard to how Estonia positions itself within an EU context in the aftermath of the economic crisis.

3.4 EUROPE OR NOT QUITE EUROPE?

With the insecurity related to Estonia being located on the 'margins' of Europe, this small state has been of interest to scholars looking into the identity and security dynamics of Estonia in relation to Russia, although more so prior to Estonia's accession to NATO and EU.

Russia, however, is not the only Other in Estonia's identity-construction. As Mälksoo argues, Estonia's 'liminal character' questions the usual binary understanding of 'Self' and 'Other' and assumes a continuum of collective identifications with varying degrees of difference, rather than clear dichotomies (2010: 67). Kuus puts forward a similar idea from a broader angle claiming that Eastern Europe itself is one of the generalised 'Others' necessary for Europe's own self-image (Kuus 2007: 36), making the conflation process a lot more complex and providing security issues with varying degrees of Europeanness and Easternness (Kuus 2004: 36). This point is highly relevant in understanding the discursive, narrative structure of identity. The aim here is not to make a clear-cut distinction between different factors or measure how they affect the construction of identity, but rather to provide a backdrop for understanding the discursive construction of national identity and perceptions of 'normality' in Estonia.

There has been a general consensus in studies focusing on Estonia that since the early 1990s the notion of securing a 'return to Europe' – and, more broadly, a 'return to the Western World' (Smith 2003a: 156) has been one of the dominating features of the national discourse in Estonia (see Lehti 2006; Lehti and Smith 2003; Mälksoo 2010 etc.). But what have 'Europe' and the 'Western World' – themselves discursive constructs – meant in this context, and how have understandings shifted over time?

The double enlargement of the European Union and NATO after the end of the Cold War was intended to erase at last the long-standing division of Europe between West and East and reunite the European continent as a cultural whole (Kuus 2007: 21). The concept of Europe is not a straightforward one and as Kuus brings out, it has functioned to maintain and reproduce the division between East and West (2007: 21).

For the Baltic States, in the 1990s, the EU and NATO integration had been securitised with the utilisation of a discourse of 'returning to Europe' in constructing their post-Cold War identities to achieve also hard military security *vis-a-vis* Russia (Browning and Joenniemi 2004: 237). Membership in these organisations was equated with international acceptance of their desired identities (Browning and Joenniemi 2004: 237) and can be seen today in the effort

to impose one's view of history at the international level as mentioned above. Among the professed reasons for such a construction was the hope that membership in Western organisations would reconstruct the relationship between Estonia and its eastern neighbour, forcing Russia to abandon its post-imperial manners and treat Estonia as a 'normal' country, rather than as part of its sphere of influence (Berg and Ehin 2009: 3). Part of this was to demonstrate Estonia as a 'normal' European country whereby problems in the Estonian-Russian relationship are viewed as Russia's unwillingness or inability to change. In addressing the core of Estonia's foreign policy, integration to the West was seen as a necessary prelude to the full 'normalisation' of relations with Russia (Smith 2003c: 64).

This narrative was rather forcefully included in Estonian public debate. In 1994, Jüri Luik, Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs (1994-1995), in his speech 'Quo Vadis Estonian Foreign Policy?' put forward an equation of 'Security equals Integration plus Normalisation'[4]. A similar idea was added by Estonia's then president Lennart Meri, who said that 'Normalisation for us means establishing the same kinds of relations with Russia as we enjoy with the United States or Germany or Sweden'[5]. On March 29, 2004 Estonia became an official member of NATO and on May 1st 2004 Estonia was conferred membership in the European Union. While this concluded Estonia's official integration into the West, it has been argued that Estonian-Russian relations did not reach the expected level of 'normalisation'. On the contrary, there are voices arguing that since Estonia was conferred membership in these Western institutions, Estonian-Russian relations have even taken a more controversial turn (Mälksoo 2006: 279; Berg and Ehin 2009: 29).

As demonstrated earlier, it is difficult to extract the *temporal* from the *spatial* in narratives of 'normality' as these perceptions also conflate. Europe as a *temporal* process for Estonia is evident in the 'return to Europe', which has been a perpetual process for Eastern Europe, even though it is geographically part of Europe (Mälksoo 2006: 276). This 'Europe but not Europe' (Wolff 1994 in Mälksoo 2006:

[4] Opening remarks by Jüri Luik, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia at the Estonian Foreign Service Annual Ambassadorial Conference, 11-12 September 1994, Roosta, Estonia; http://www.vm.ee/en/news/quo-vadis-estonian-foreign-policy (accessed 20.11.2015)

[5] Address by Lennart Meri, President of the Republic of Estonia at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 19 October 1995, Washington, D.C.; https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/eng/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=9360 (accessed 20.11.2015)

276) has left an imprint on the foreign and security policies of the Baltic States and designates 'Othering' and exclusion of Russia (Mälksoo 2006: 277; Browning and Joenniemi 2004: 236).

And the *spatial* perception of belonging to Europe can be seen as interconnected to the *temporal* process. Merje Kuus in her book 'Geopolitics Reframed' (2007) refers to the increasing importance of fluid categories in determining the boundaries of Europe. Kuus, writing shortly after the 2004 accession, argues that even after the enlargement, the notion of 'East of Europe' did not disappear and that in order to better understand the construction of 'Europe', the question rather remained as to how claims and assumptions about Europe and the East functioned in political debates and policy-making (2007: 21-22). She argues that Europe was bound up with a narrative of Eastern Europe being insecure due to external pressures while at the same time being a source of insecurity for Europe as a whole (2007: 22). The categories for defining East and West had become more fluid – reconfigured into an East-West slope of Eastness and Europeanness (2007: 22). Kuus also states that the enlargement processes were fuelling a tripartite division of the continent into the European core; the accession countries, which are not yet fully European but in tune with the European project, and the Eastern peripheries of Europe, effectively excluded from membership (2007: 22). This division was also used by the accession countries to stress their insecurity and to shift the insecurity to Europe proper by inscribing Eastness further East. The double enlargement is therefore working in tandem with the notion of a multitiered Europe in which Europeanness declines as one moves east (Kuus 2007: 22). Kuus also brings out that the notion that some places in Europe were more European than others (usually located either in the Western as opposed to the Eastern part of the continent) was still the commonsense container of the EU and NATO enlargement discourse (2007: 37). Using Estonia as an example, she focuses more on the ever-growing ambiguity of security claims in Europe. Again, the relevance of margins in constructing geopolitical discourses is accentuated. As can be seen from this study, in the case of Estonia, there has been a shift in how people there inscribe to Europeanness with the security issues having diminished and the economic, pragmatic aspects becoming more pertinent nearly a decade after officially 'returning to Europe'.

Adding to the previously mentioned research regarding defining the boundaries of Europe, the 'liminal' character of Estonia is emphasised also by Maria Mälksoo. She states that 'liminality is an especially appropriate notion for examining the historically peripheral Baltic States' self-positioning in Europe' (Mälksoo 2009: 66). In an earlier publication, Mälksoo investigates the Baltic States' self-positioning within the European foreign policy, by developing this notion of 'Europe but not quite Europe' even further and demonstrates that the existential politics in the Baltic States was far from becoming 'normal politics', defined in terms of desecuritisation (Mälksoo 2006: 275).

Different perspectives have surfaced, looking at the importance of security within the regionalisation theme (Browning and Joenniemi 2004), focusing on the receding threat emanating from Russia (Noreen and Sjöstedt 2004) or understanding the relevance of 'societal security' within the Baltic context (Löfgren and Herd 2001).

Another study focusing on Estonia's 'return to the West' is edited by Marju Lauristin, Peeter Vihalemm, Karl Erik Rosengren, and Lennart Weibull and titled 'Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition' (1997). Using survey data they claim that Estonia somehow maintained elements of Western culture throughout the Soviet occupation and passed those sensibilities down through generations. However, they also point out differences between value structures in Estonia compared to other Western or Northern countries. Comparing values with Swedes in 1991, they found that health, world peace, family safety, true friendship and happiness were all equally important for the groups. However, at the same time the Swedes held high regard for so-called postmodern values such as honesty, freedom, fairness, mature love and internal harmony, while for the Estonians accomplishment, self-realisation, wealth and power were important values Lauristin et al. 1997 in Realo 2017: 63). This point is argued also by Kuus as she states that Estonia desires a 'return to the West' and to be recognised as an integral part of the Western cultural realm was the driving force of its foreign and security policies (Kuus 2007: 39).

The ‘return to Europe’ narrative defines not only what Estonia is but just as importantly what it is not (Feldman 2001: 10). Throughout the 1990s, a variety of contentious issues dominated Russian-Baltic relations, starting from the question of the withdrawal of the Russian troops and the status of the Russophone population and the Russian Orthodox Church to agreeing on trade and transit issues, definition of borders and the Baltic aspirations to join the EU and NATO, to name a few (Berg and Ehin 2009: 3). Berg and Ehin argue that one of the key sources for contention in the post-accession period (up to 2009 when the book was published) was the normative gap between an increasingly authoritarian Russia and the Western community of liberal-democratic states (2009: 7). This refers to a West understood in terms of law and order *versus* the chaotic and arbitrary East (Brüggemann 2007: 144). Kuus (2007) also highlights a similar point in stating that Oriental despotism, linked to the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, was considered an essential attribute of the Russian mentality (Kuus 2007: 23).

This perceived dividing line between the East and the West – or where Europe ends – was further consolidated in Estonia when Samuel Huntington’s ‘Clash of Civilizations’ was published in 1996. Huntington drew the line ending the Western civilization on the Narva River between Estonia and Russia, placing Estonia firmly in ‘Europe’. As Kuus (2007: 52) has pointed out as well, one cannot underestimate the importance of this work in Estonia – it formed the conceptual backbone for Estonian political speeches, policy analysis and academic research. Huntington’s work has been influential in further consolidating Estonian national-identity construction in terms of firmly placing Estonia within the European realm while providing a scientific basis for Othering Russia. It was translated into Estonian in 1999 and had a foreword written by the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs (Kuus 2007: 54).

Going back to the wider geopolitical elements in understanding Estonian ‘normality’, there remains limited ethnographic or bottom-up work done in this area, even though the need for such an approach has been acknowledged. In some of her later work (2010, 2011), Merje Kuus has emphasised the need for a more varied approach in understanding the geopolitical identities. She argues for the use of ethnographic methods in receiving a better understanding of the interconnections between geopolitical practices and the agents of these practices

(2011). One of the few contributors to the field of Estonian identity politics who conducted interviews for his research, is Pami Aalto. In his book 'Constructing Geopolitics in post-Soviet Estonia' (2003), which adds a subjective aspect of political space to this field of research, Aalto has suggested methodological pluralism in identity studies and uses Q-methodology to develop an understanding of the subjective viewpoints of Estonians and Russophones (Russian-speaking population) in relation to security and identity (Aalto 2003: 575-576). This research uses a slightly different method to also explore subjective viewpoints on dominant constructions of 'normality' (and 'abnormality') in a post-2004 context. Aalto finds that there is not only a single security/identity puzzle but many and that the connection between identity and security is neither loose nor tight but varied (Aalto 2003: 587-589). The multiple layers of inter-community identities in Estonia have also been addressed by, among others, Triin Vihalemm (2007), Raivo Vetik et al. (2006), David D. Laitin (2003).

The interethnic relations or themes of minority rights in Estonia (discussed also in section 1.4) have received their share of academic attention (in addition to the already mentioned, see Smith 2002a, 2003b, Galbreath 2005, Lauristin and Heidmets 2002, Pettai 1995, 2000, 2001, 2006, Pettai and Hallik 2002, Pettai and Kallas 2009, Brosig 2006, Sasse 2008, Agarin and Regelmann 2012, Vihalemm and Masso 2003, 2007, Vihalemm and Kalmus 2009, Nimmerfeldt 2009, Sjöstedt 2018 etc.). These studies take on a variety of issues related to national minority and interethnic issues in Estonia ranging from structural and institutional to political and cultural, but the topic can be said to have been of particular interest to scholars prior to Estonia joining the EU. However, within this wider debate, scholarly attention to Estonian language policy, as one of the main constitutive elements in Estonian national identity construction for integration continues to be examined in terms of education policy (Zabrodskaya 2015; Kemppainen, Hilton and Rannut 2015; Soll, Salvet, Masso 2015; Soll 2015 etc.), labour market and the already mentioned consumer practices (Leppik and Vihalemm 2015; Keller and Vihalemm 2005; Seliverstova 2009), and cultural events (e.g. Laulupidu) (Pawłusz 2018) in a variety of academic fields. This research does not aim to contribute to the detailed accounts of interethnic relations in Estonia *per se*, but rather bring forward the perception of 'normality' through constructions of national identity and examine the possible variations within these understandings. Chapter 7 will

explore in more detail what constitutes 'normal' interethnic relations in the context of a 'European' Estonia still defined in relation to a Russian 'Other'. However, it is not the only aspect discussed in relation to the more internal essence of Estonian national identity constructions. As this research demonstrates, it is important to move beyond the ethnic dimension, which has been dominant in studies of Estonian nation-building to date, and also explore other important themes and questions that have arisen post-2004.

3.5 NEW LABELS AND LOOKING AHEAD

In addition and conflated to a degree into the core themes of national identity constructions in Estonia of Othering Russia, conflicting history narratives and 'returning to Europe', Estonia has had several labels attached to its self-definitions: Baltic, Nordic, Western, 'new Europe', 'not quite Europe' etc. Some of them internally sought after and others externally attached.

The 'Baltic' label used to be somewhat less appealing to Estonia and the rest of the Baltic States after regaining independence since it was seen as a continuation of Easternisation and as a part of the Soviet legacy (Lehti 2006: 72). However, since joining the European Union and NATO, the 'Baltic' label has regained its usage and is used rather in terms of forming a distinct interest group within the European Union (Lehti 2007: 144).

The Baltic label has come back to demonstrate the new, adaptable innovative countries in the European sphere (Lehti 2007: 140). Also, Estonia has made the attempt to establish itself as an innovative country with its IT sector (Lehti 2007: 140). This 'attempt' is still an ongoing process with the IT dimension utilised in Estonia as part of nation-branding efforts (see Jordan 2014; Tammpuu and Masso 2018). This mostly internally attached image of E-stonia will receive some further discussion under the wider economic aspects of everyday lives discussed in Chapter 7. These economic aspects and what could be constituted as 'economic normality' in Estonia are especially relevant to explore in the context of the economic crisis.

As already discussed in Chapter 1, being a Nordic country was an appealing prospect for Estonia in the 1990s. Marko Lehti and David J. Smith have edited a volume 'Post-Cold War Identity Politics: Northern and Baltic Experiences' (2003) unfolding the spatial and identity politics of the Baltic States and Northern European area by focusing on regionality, boundaries and history. In general, the volume refutes essentialist theorising of identity-construction and gives interesting perspectives for understanding the relevance of 'new' Post-Cold War identities in the Baltic States and Finland. In the case of Estonia, the volume focuses on the branding of Estonia as another Nordic country. It brings out that even though the Nordic dimension had assumed prominence in the speeches and writing of Estonian political actors in the 1990s (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Toomas Hendrik Ilves in particular), the narrative did not seem to correspond to the international reality in the eyes of the Estonian public (2003: 185). While co-operation with the Nordic countries was seen as very important, this did not necessarily mean that Estonia was regarded as part of the Nordic grouping – a point of view that was shared by the Nordic countries (2003: 185).

This notion of becoming a Nordic country can be said to have lost some of its relevance after Estonia's accession to the European Union in 2004, since it was mostly used instrumentally to support the overriding aim of getting into the EU. In the post-accession period, it can be argued that it has remained a useful category but its function changed and is incorporated here from a slightly different perspective, looking at the Northern and Nordic dimension through Estonia's self-positioning in Europe (see Chapter 5, and also discussion in Chapter 7).

However, the Nordic dimension in Estonian identity-construction has certainly not disappeared entirely. Anu Realo (2017), who has compared the values in Estonia and Nordic countries, has pointed out that the rational-secular values, which place Estonia within the Nordic group were dominant still in 2011. Individual freedom and the right to make one's own choices were seen as core values. However, the emphasis was still rather on values related to survival than freedom of expression. Estonians had a lot less trust, tolerance and happiness than Swedes or Finns and emphasised more the fight against rising prices and maintaining order in the state rather than freedom of speech and the possibility to have a say in the country's matters (Realo 2017: 63). Realo (2017: 63) describes this as Estonians having one

foot in the Nordic countries and one in the Soviet past. However, she (2017) also notes that the Estonian perception of the Nordic does not coincide with what the Nordic is envisioned to entail in these respective countries, especially in terms of socially caring world view, something certainly not promoted by neoliberal economic policies that the governments mostly carried in Estonia. A reconfiguration of the idea of Estonia being Nordic – the New Nordic - was put forward in 2015 by the liberal Reform Party who was in power at the time and their election platform at the time is a good indication of what Estonia as a Nordic country was envisioned to be.

> "This means a country that has achieved the Nordic standard of living and safety but continues to hold top positions in the world for personal and economic liberties. A country that is technologically more dynamic and flexible than the old Nordic countries. It is a country firmly defended through independent defence willingness and capabilities, and with strong alliance ties across the Atlantic. It is a country with the fastest economic growth rates and where personal liberties and grand narratives are prioritised. As a country where having three kids in the family is the new normality and the population is growing. The New Nordic is well protected, economically successful, guaranteeing equal opportunity, valuing family and carrying the European values. We are no longer balancing between the East and West, we have made our choice!" (Reform Party 2015[6])

The perception of Nordic can be seen as framed by the neoliberal paradigm which goes against the socially caring world view but is in line here with the more specific nationalist neoliberalism in Estonia discussed in the following section.

Another recurring term used along with several others in defining Estonia is 'new Europe'. A volume edited by David J. Smith 'The Baltic States and their region: New Europe or Old?' (2005) represents an attempt to locate the Baltic Sea region countries within the European identity and as the title suggests, looks at the identity construction through the debate of 'old' versus 'new' Europe. As to Estonia (and Latvia), Marko Lehti in his chapter disentangles the central elements of identity construction in Estonia by looking, again, at the narratives of history. Lehti claims that this construction is being challenged by the idea of 'new Europe' in an effort to save the unity of the old West, which for so long had formed a state of 'normality' in Estonian and Latvian political discourses (Lehti 2005: 106-107).

[6] Reform Party 2015 (https://www.reform.ee/uus-pohjamaa), accessed 03.01.2016

However, Estonia's politicians have not been satisfied with Estonia being labelled 'new Europe' and much less 'false Europe'. This latter term is used by Iver Neumann (1996) in referring to Russia's efforts to discredit the Baltic States in the eyes of the West. These terms have been regarded as tools of Othering or at least of marginalisation (Lehti 2006: 70). In another article by Lehti, he argues that there has been a shift in how the Baltic States define themselves. Rather than accepting external labels like 'new Europe' on themselves, they have started to aspire to a voice of their own (Lehti 2007: 128). Being in the EU has provided Estonian elites a stronger position to argue for the Europe based on their understandings of 'normality' (e.g. 'more Western than the West' in relation to understanding Russia (see Chapter 6) and 'true' Europe in terms of adopting austerity measures (see Chapter 5)).

In Lehti's view the answers to political goals are no longer as simple and obvious as they were in the 'heroic age' of struggle towards the West (Lehti 2007: 137). Whereas during the first fifteen years of independence, 'normality' for Estonia rested in European Union and NATO, then after joining these structures, the 'West' has lost its significance for the Balts (Lehti 2007: 136). In fact, the old West which the Balts believed they were joining seemed simultaneously to be fading away (Lehti 2007: 138-140). Lehti's point that Estonia joined the EU and NATO at a time when the West no longer appeared fixed, but rather as something 'fluid and contested' (Lehti 2007: 137-138) also supports Kuus' argument on varying degrees of Europeanness (see section 3.4). This demonstrates the processual nature of self-identification, which cannot be solely examined on one level since it is never simply a country or community whose perception of identity shifts and cannot therefore be taken out of the whole system to be examined separately from it. This research therefore provides valuable insights into the discourses Estonia has deployed as it tried to customise a fluid Europe to fit its own requirements as well as how people understand the overall processes on an everyday level.

As briefly stated earlier, a certain role in Estonia's depiction within Europe is also played by the Russian Federation whose authorities have accused the Balts of being not only ultra-nationalistic and xenophobic but also hostile and Russophobic casting them outside the liberal and democratic values of 'Europe' (Lehti 2006:

76). Through that Russia was trying to increase Estonia's 'alterity' within the 'new Europe' while reducing its own (see section 6.2.2).

Lehti also emphasises the Baltic States' allegiance to the United States of America and how the Euro-Atlantic space has become fundamental to Estonia's self-identification (Lehti 2007: 137). The East-West dichotomy has lost its relevance as the American perspective on the eastern border is not so important any longer, and what matters is the war on terror that has so far remained a distant issue for the Balts (Lehti 2007: 139). However, Estonia and the other Baltic States still had to contribute to the 'war on terror' because it is their 'moral obligation to be part of the Western community' (Lehti 2007: 139). Thus, the understandings regarding the West are not always congruent between 'new Europe' and the United States, even if this might appear to be the case at first sight (Lehti 2007: 139).

3.6 THE NEOLIBERAL PARADIGM

As already mentioned in the introductory chapter (section 1.6), economic issues have also played their part as a fundamental element of identity construction in Estonia. Estonia's so-called economic miracle (Laar 2007) has been highlighted by the political elite and utilised to demonstrate the country's uniqueness and acceptance by the West. The general consensus regarding neoliberal economic policy in Estonia certainly forms an important part of the national identity constructions with the pragmatic approach from this framework carrying through to its foreign policy – including relations with Russia. The unquestionable reliance on the free-market agenda has been a part of a top-down discourse of 'normality' shaped by the experience of the 1990s, but how is this internalised and negotiated by the wider population? This is one of the questions I explore in this thesis.

Estonia's superior economic performance during the first transition decade has generated much interest and a variety of different explanations (Norkus 2007: 23). Some explanatory factors for this success have included Estonia's macroeconomic choices after independence (including the pressures from the international organisations), its economic structure upon gaining independence, Estonia's

geographical position and proximity to Finland (see Norgaard 2000), its cultural and social capital accumulated during the Soviet era and prior to that (Norkus 2007). It has been claimed that Estonians were more receptive to the neoliberal reforms implemented in the beginning of 1990s due to the cultural background stemming from the pre-Soviet era and going back as far as the 18th-19th century version of Protestantism, which has been viewed as a contributing cultural factor to how capitalism was consolidated in Estonia (Norkus 2007). While Lauristin and Vihalemm (2009) have analysed how the nature of interaction between external and internal actors can have some explanatory power in the changes that the transition period brought about, Feldman and Sally (2002), see Estonian exceptionalism and economic success to lie in the 'bottom up' or 'home-grown' reforms, rather than external pressure.

Even though several issues are raised in the academic literature about Estonia's economic performance, the Estonian media and general public have been generally supportive of the neoliberal reforms implemented in the beginning of 1990s. The Estonian transition culture favoured individualistic values, economic success and competitiveness and the Estonian right-wing parties combined this with a populist nationalist appeal, which enabled them to secure their hegemonic position (Lauristin and Vihalemm 2009: 20).

The common-sense of neoliberal hegemony has not been seriously tested or questioned in Estonia even after 'successfully' transforming into a Western market state and joining the EU structures over a decade ago. While the economic crisis, that hit Estonia relatively hard in 2008-2009, brought about protests and calls for change in the financial sector in various other European countries (e.g. Greece, Portugal, Spain), it had few significant political consequences in Estonia. Estonia adopted restrict austerity measures, which did not lead to any significant domestic unrest and, instead, the perception that Estonia managed a successful fiscal consolidation earned it the image of the shining poster-boy of crisis management (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 435). As Thorhallsson and Kattel point out, the political crisis in Estonia was relatively small, the public protest was almost non-existent (despite unemployment reaching near 20% in 2009), and the coalition that ruled Estonia into and throughout the crisis was elected back into office in March 2011, post-crisis (the coalition gained 56 seats out of 101) (2013: 94). The

consequence of the crisis can therefore be interpreted as strengthening the neoliberal and non-corporatist political paradigm (Thorhallsson and Kattel 2013: 94). They provide several reasons for why it turned out as it did in Estonia:

> "First, the government was extremely successful in depicting the crisis as exogenous in nature and thus was able to argue that Estonia's economic policy and political landscape essentially needed no changes.
>
> Second, the only substantial policy change foreseen by the government was to enforce the entrance into the euro zone, which, in turn, made massive fiscal retrenchment necessary. Thus, the government was able to offer one overarching aim and direction for political discussions during the crisis, pre-empting and silencing any opposing voices in the process.
>
> Third, coalition politicians as well as members of the wider political elite, such as the president, stigmatized very early on any open political protest as unpatriotic and, in essence, as akin to violent street protest by Russian youth following the removal of the Bronze Soldier statue (commemorating World War II) from downtown Tallinn (the first violent protest since 1991) in April 2007. This effectively stigmatized any active public voicing of discontent.
>
> Fourth, as argued above, given the circumstances of Estonia's economic and fiscal policy choices during the past two decades, and (non-)evolution of policy skills accordingly, the government had effectively cornered itself into a situation where it had only one option; to enforce euro adoption by any means possible. This had become the coalition's guarantee of survival and, indeed, following the successful and widely lauded euro adoption in January 2011, the coalition won elections in March 2011." (Thorhallsson and Kattel 2013: 95).

The points put forward by Thorhallsson and Kattel encapsulate the recurrent tendency to securitise any kind of economic counter-narrative. This can be explained by the nationalist neoliberalism (see also section 1.6) that had developed in Estonia. Kattel and Raudla (2013: 442-443) have brought out the main characteristics of nationalist neoliberalism, which is reflected in a very open economy with governments looking for further ways for liberalisation and deregularisation, low personal and company income tax, relatively flexible labour markets, high level of direct foreign investments, relatively stable governments, increasing importance of the core executive with weak to non-existing social partnerships, increasing importance of external ideas and policies in the sphere of economic policies, and language and cultural policies favouring respective majority nations. They point out that somewhat ironically there are almost no

nationalist elements in Estonian (and other Baltic States') economic policies but rather it is the functioning of the markets that is seen to deliver also national survival (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 443). This nationalist neoliberalism led to the emergence of decidedly simple polities in the Baltic states, which led to the evolution of specific institutional interactions and policy capacities and implicit politicisation of the executive branch in terms of their adherence to the basic tenets of nationalist neoliberalism (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 443). In Estonia this resulted in a specific elite building with a discernible *esprit de corps* and 'wide policy goals based on some form of implicit social consensus, such as entry into the EU and NATO, played a crucial role in mobilising the emerging elite and justifying the beliefs and value systems reflected in nationalist neo-liberalism' (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 443). However, at same time the role of social partners in policy coordination remained undeveloped (Kattel and Raudla 2013: 443). The dominance of the neoliberal paradigm in guiding politics in Estonia has been established by these studies. An interesting question becomes how this nationalist neoliberal paradigm frames relations with Russia after joining the EU and NATO, which, as demonstrated above, failed to 'normalise' the relations and themes of security still form a part of Russia as the Other in Estonian identity-building.

The effect the neoliberal paradigm has had in relation to Russia has been elaborated by Agnia Grigas in her book 'The Politics of Energy and Memory between the Baltic States and Russia' (2013) where as part of the study she looks at how business interests have influenced the course of foreign policy making in all three Baltic States. She claims that Russian business lobby has been more marginal in Estonia than in the other two Baltic States which can be explained to a degree by the firmly rooted neoliberal economic policy. Grigas argues that there has indeed been a more general shift towards pragmatism in relations with Russia – a point which – as we will see – is supported by the research at hand. One has to keep in mind though that both Grigas' argument and the data collected for this study predate Russia's occupation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbass region, which is seen here to constitute the start of a 'new normality' in Europe.

However instructing and relevant for understanding Estonian national identity through the neoliberal paradigm, these different interpretations have yet to be explored through the grassroots perspectives, which is the aim of this research.

As the following analysis also shows, in a more nuanced manner, neoliberalism has become internalised in Estonia as a fundamental component of ontological security and 'normality'. The neoliberal guiding principles – to which no alternative is seen in Estonia – are conflated with the previously discussed spatial and temporal dimensions of identity-construction and provide a complex context for negotiating various themes related to identity for people in Estonia.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter starts by providing some insights on 'normality' in relation to Estonia's nation-building process starting from the beginning of 1990s. The wider over-arching concept of 'normality' has been furnished in this section with the various core themes of Estonian national identity brought forward by the bulk of research conducted on the topic since the 1990s. However, as also demonstrated throughout this chapter, the ethnographic and bottom-up approach has received fairly little attention and uncovering how ordinary people think about various identity-related themes in the post-EU context, deserves a more careful examination.

The chapter situates the current study in relation to existing work on the question of national identity in contemporary Estonia and brings out the main themes explored in this field. These themes provide the context for addressing the post-accession 'normality' in Estonia, and this research is guided by them. The thread running through this literature review demonstrate the *spatial* and *temporal* narratives in Estonian 'normality' mostly in the pre-accession era and addresses some of the changes within these narratives through previous research. First, it discusses the role of conflicting narratives of history with Russia and memory politics in general play in Estonia's identity and how it frames the policy-making. Second, since identity is always constructed in relation to Other, the various Others of Estonia's identity-building process are discussed. This includes the widely discussed threatening qualities of Russia as the Other, but also how the perceptions of Europe and the European Union guide Estonia's self-positioning in the international sphere and how this in turn impacts upon people's perceptions

of everyday life and through that 'normality' on a grassroots level. Third, it gives an overview of other labels attached, whether internally or externally, to Estonia's self-definition. These include regional identification labels such as Baltic or Nordic, temporal concepts such as new Europe, and attempts to establish Estonia as the flexible, innovative and an economic success story within the new democracies of 1990s. Finally, the unquestionable neoliberal agenda which has been part of a top-down discourse of 'normality' in Estonia is discussed and a useful term of nationalist neoliberalism for understanding this paradigm in Estonia is brought explained to help frame the discussion around neoliberalism in the following empirical chapters.

As demonstrated in the chapter, the 'returning to Europe', constructions of Russia as the Other in Estonia's identity-building process and conflicting narratives of history emerge as the underlying themes, which have framed Estonia's identity construction and shaped perceptions of 'normality'. As stated earlier, these themes guided the methodology of this research, and this will be discussed next.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

At the risk of overemphasising the main premise of the methodology, the goal in this research is not to achieve objective reality, but to understand the Estonian post-accession 'normality' in relation to constructs of national identity by drawing upon multiple perceptions (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 7). These multiple perceptions, or interpretations of these perceptions, are achieved in this research through conducting in-depth unstructured interviews. The interviews conducted for this research were not simply talk-based, but also incorporated a visual aspect - namely image elicitation. In this sense, the research at hand is not only significant for adding to the little-explored bottom-up perspective in the existing academic literature on Estonian national identity, but also for incorporating a novel approach in order to receive different, more expanded empirical data in comparison to what the more traditional understanding of a talk-based interview produces. The choice of images was guided by previous academic research and seen to largely depict the dominant discursive practices in Estonia on these topics and therefore provided a solid basis for exploring the relationship between the top-down narratives and everyday understandings. This was then supplemented by analysing the top-down media discourse in Estonia.

This chapter provides an overview of how I approached the data collection stage of this research. It starts with developing an understanding of the strategic approach and outlines briefly the methods used for this research. It goes on to examine the theory behind conducting research interviews and provides an overview of the sample. It then continues with the discussion on how visual methodology can offer additional value to the data received through interviews

and provides a detailed overview of how the images were used for this particular research. It reflects on the interviewing process, provides insights into ethical considerations with this type of research and discusses my position as a researcher in this process. It also examines transcribing, translating and analysis conducted on the interview data. Since I used Estonian media to supplement the interview data, the top-down media discourse and its relevance for this research will be addressed in the last part of this chapter.

4.2 STRATEGIC APPROACH

Theory guides us in research and understanding how things fit together is fundamental to the research process (King and Horrocks 2010: 10-11). This research focuses on examining the thicker points of reference for 'normality' in relation to constructions of Estonian national identity and explores how these constructs have been produced, reproduced, internalised, contextualised and transformed by the people living in Estonia. The theoretical underpinnings for conducting this research are taken from the constructivist paradigm, discussed in the second chapter focusing on theoretical premises, which has firmly established its place in identity studies within the past two decades.

Before delving further into the research methods used within the constructivist paradigm, I will first discuss the overall research strategy and methodology intrinsic to exploring the research problem at hand. Taking several steps back from the methods used directly for data-gathering and looking at the overall approach, then this research follows the abductive strategy of research which is peculiar to the social sciences (Blaikie 2000: 114). The abductive strategy as described by Norman Blaikie involves developing descriptions and constructing theory that is grounded in everyday activities and/or in the language and meanings of the social actors (Blaikie 2000: 91). It includes describing these activities and meanings and deriving categories and concepts to understand the problem at hand (Blaikie 2000: 91).

Consistent with the social constructivist understanding and the abductive approach mentioned above, the theoretical premise for exploring the constructions of Estonian national identity comes from the ontological position that reality is not seen as something out there for people to interpret but it is rather created through interaction and intersubjective understandings of the social world.

The social world is seen as the world interpreted and experienced by its members from the 'inside' (Blaikie 2000: 115) and should therefore be addressed on that level. Intersubjectivity is defined here as shared understandings of the social world. These understandings are developed in interactions with other members of the social world, and within the context of this research, the way these understandings are passed on to the researcher also belongs to the realm of intersubjectivity. It is the everyday beliefs and practices, mundane and taken for granted, which Norman Blaikie has termed unarticulated 'background knowledge', which have to be grasped and articulated by the social researcher in order to provide an understanding for these actions (Blaikie 2000: 115). Exploring this 'background knowledge' or taken-for-granted perceptions is the basis for examining the points of reference of Estonian post-accession 'normality'.

Following the same logic, the epistemological premise of this study on Estonian national identity is the underlying idea that knowledge is socially constructed. This means that rather than objects having meaning in the world that exists independently from our conscious interpretations of them, our interpretations and representations construct objects (King and Horrocks 2010: 21).

In short, in order to negotiate their way around their world and make sense of it, social actors have to interpret their activities and it is these meanings, embedded in language, that constitute their social reality (Blaikie 2000: 115). The aim here is to understand these social realities that have been produced and are continuously being reproduced. In order to develop insights into the Estonian 'imagined political community', which is discursively constructed, and not completely consistent, stable and immutable, the bottom-up perspective taken in this study becomes a highly useful one in uncovering these complex social realities.

4.3 METHODS

Following the theoretical underpinnings in Chapter 2 of how 'normality' is approached here and national identity constructed, the research strategy adopted here provides the best approach for gaining an understanding of the research questions explored in this thesis.

> How is 'normality' constructed and understood by people in Estonia in the post-accession context?
>
> > - how did the relation between Estonia and the European Other change in constructions of Estonian identity during the first decade after accession to Western structures?
> >
> > - how did the mode of Othering Russia change in this new context?
> >
> > - how did people in Estonia negotiate the current 'normality' in their everyday perspective?

However, there are several possible ways of obtaining data that would fit in this theoretical framework and the methods for approaching this highly complex subject play a crucial role in the final results achieved.

As mentioned, I adopted a largely bottom-up approach for my research and utilised a combination of methods to answer the posed research questions with the aim of receiving complex in-depth data. First, secondary sources were used to provide a framework for how to approach my core questions. The main themes discussed in the bulk of previous research on Estonian national identity were extracted to help frame data collection from the 'members inside this social world' – i.e. the people in Estonia.

The literature review in Chapter 2 provides a more extensive overview of the various themes in Estonian identity-building. Three wider themes were extracted from the previous research to guide my own data collection on the subject.

- the often-repeated narrative of 'return to Europe';
- Russia as the significant Other (with Europe as Other covered in the first theme);
- conflicting history narratives.

These themes formed the basis for selecting certain key events, persons, objects generally seen as associated with these themes and the formed the grounds for choosing images from the media and other sources in order to provide a stimulus for discussion. While there are certainly other themes that have been addressed in prior research (as demonstrated in Chapter 3), these three have featured most prominently in the literature on Estonian national identity and, as said, were used to guide further data collection rather than an attempt to simply try to fill these with meaning through a bottom-up approach. Selecting images for discussion from the media and other sources based on these themes already provides a solid basis for exploring the relationship between the top-down narratives and everyday understandings.

The second method I used was in-depth interviews with both Estonian- and Russian-speakers in Estonia. The data received through conducting interviews forms the most significant part of this research, with the other methods are supporting the preparation for the interviews and supplementing the analysis of these data. The interviewing process included a more novel visual component, which will be discussed in detail further in this chapter.

Third, media analysis was conducted on Estonian daily papers to supplement the interview data in order to pull together a fuller picture of the top-down discourse. The media analysis serves an illustrative purpose for this research. I took certain key moments discussed in the academic literature and looked at how these were discussed in the Estonian media. The images drawn from the media and media texts themselves provided a good point of reference for analysing the results obtained from the interviews.

Interviewing and media analysis will be discussed in this chapter with the main emphasis on interviewing and the visual methodology incorporated into the interviewing process. The already-mentioned themes emerging from the secondary sources will be addressed in more detail in the section on interviews, since this method provided a backdrop for preparing for the interviewing process. A method in a method in a sense. This chapter will also discuss the sampling process, issues with using three languages in research, reflect on my role as a

researcher in the interviewing process, and bring out some ethical considerations for conducting this kind of qualitative research.

4.4 RESEARCH THROUGH INTERVIEWS

In order to gain a better understanding of Estonian 'normality', the 'inside' view of the social world is explored in this thesis via in-depth interviews with Estonian- and Russian-speakers in Estonia. Following the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research, interviews provide a suitable means for addressing the research questions at hand, as the best starting point for understanding people's constructions of reality is to 'ask people and ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms and in depth, which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings' (Jones 2004: 258).

The research interview is seen here as an *inter-view* where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2008: 1). The interview is expected to elicit interpretations of the world, for it is itself an object of interpretation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2008: 163). However, these elicited interpretations of the world generate substantial data on key referents in national identity construction that deepen our understanding of the process and allow for more in-depth understanding of the Estonian post-accession 'normality'.

The interpretation social actors have for their activities and meanings is embedded in language, so language has the potential to construct particular versions of reality, with each language constructing reality in its own way (Kvale 1996: 43). The struggles of conducting research of this nature in three separate languages (Estonian, Russian and English), also considering the processes of translation and transcribing, will be discussed throughout the following sections of this chapter, as it can have a significant impact on research.

Preparing for a research interview depends on the approach taken to the research question at hand. As discussed already, theoretically the principal idea behind the interviews for this research was to allow the respondents to discuss in depth the

various aspects of national identity in Estonia and through that explore their perceptions of 'normality'. Most commonly in social research, a 'look into' the social worlds of the participants would be achieved through unstructured or semi-structured interviews. For this research, I did not have a structured interview schedule, however, I used images to facilitate the interviewing process. The visual methodology and photo elicitation will be discussed in more length after I provide an overview of the sample

4.5 SAMPLING

Before starting the fieldwork, I had to consider who could constitute a respondent for this research. There are certain limitations to recruiting respondents in this case, but it is certainly not too restrictive. Within this qualitative paradigm and theoretical basis, a desirable respondent would be someone who has the ability to reflect on Estonia's self-positioning and history, who is articulate, and who has the time and will to be interviewed (see Morse 1998: 73). I was looking for 'rich' data and possible different perspectives in Estonia.

For drawing out similarities and possible differences and gaining the best possible explanations of the phenomena (Stake 1998: 102), I conducted 33 interviews with Estonian- and Russian-speakers in Estonia and Belgium (Brussels) between January 2013 and January 2014. The interviews took place in various locations with people of different ages, occupations, background and gender, in order to gain a variety of perspectives. I deliberately chose a range of urban and rural locations, including some in a border setting. I conducted interviews in the border town Narva, which is predominantly Russian-speaking, did interviews in the South-Eastern Setomaa, which has a distinctive ethnic (Setos), linguistic (Seto language) and cultural setting, went to Muhu island in order to include the island perspectives with their distinctive culture and identity, and interviewed people in other rural parts of Estonia. As to the urban locations, over half of the interviews were held in Tallinn, where almost a third of the Estonian population is registered as living, and in Brussels with Estonian officials. The interviews with Estonian officials in Brussels were conducted with the expectation of incorporating a more top-down

perspective on Estonian 'normality' from 'Europe' (discussed in more detail just below).

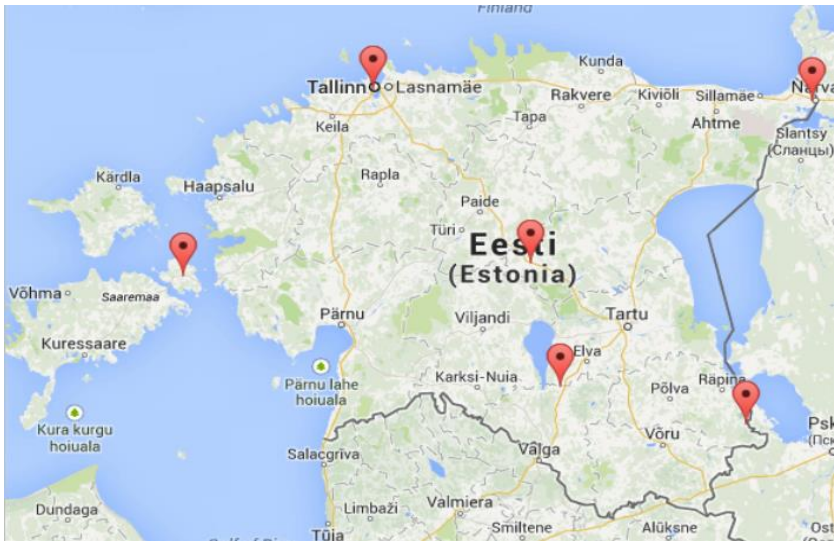


Figure 1. Map of interviews held in Estonia (Source used: Google Maps)

Out of the 33 interviews, 14 were held in Tallinn with both Estonian- and Russian-speakers, 5 were conducted in Narva with Russian-speakers, 2 interviews were done in Central Estonia (Põltsamaa and Pajusi), another 2 in Southern Estonia (Hellenurme), 2 interviews on Muhu Island (Liiva), 2 interviews in South East Estonia (Setomaa) and another 6 interviews were held in Brussels with Estonian officials there with the expectation of incorporating a more top-down view. The map in Figure 1 illustrates the locations in Estonia where the interviews took place. The interviews were recorded with a digital recording device. A consent form (see Appendix C) was provided to the respondents prior to recording. They were provided an information sheet (see Appendix B) regarding the aim the research, made well aware what the purpose of recording was and that they could withdraw from the process at any point.

Reflecting on the data received through the interviews in Brussels, the previously expected top-down view was not achieved through interviewing Estonian officials there. In certain cases (e.g. related to the EU or perception of Europe) their position in Brussels appeared to have provided a more reflective view of these aspects. However, given the usually temporary nature of their positions there and how most of them related to personal experiences in Estonia in discussing the interview themes, then these data are analysed in a similar manner to other respondents whom I interviewed in Estonia. These possible differences in the nature of the data, especially regarding perceptions of Europe, will be reflected

on further in the first empirical chapter, Chapter 5, along with the specific data from these interviews.

As to demographics of the respondents, apart from two interviews in Tallinn and the five interviews in Narva, the respondents were Estonian-speakers. An overview detailing all the respondents is provided in Appendix A. The respondents were of different gender and their age varied from 22-77. The occupations included a variety of business sectors, state officials, pensioners, home-makers, students etc. When not specifically stated otherwise in the descriptions of respondents, then the interview was held in Estonian. Having a contextual background for the respondents provides a better understanding of how one or another might have approached the topic and therefore this overview forms a part of the methodological approach for exploring the grassroots' perspectives.

As can be seen, limited attention was given to representativeness. Rather than aspiring to statistical generalisability or representativeness, the aim was to reflect the diversity within the population (Barbour 2001: 1115). My respondents were people from different linguistic communities, rural and urban locations (seen as a key identity cleavage since 1991) and age groups. I was looking to talk to people who would have some interest in these issues, willingness to take part in this project and ability to articulate their views, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of how Estonian identity is perceived, how these perceptions guide people in their understanding of the world around them and how Estonian 'normality' is in the process of being re-constructed through these understandings and perceptions. Reflections on the sample, e.g. how I recruited the respondents, some aspects relating to region and language will be discussed in further details in a section focusing on the interviewing process, since it is important to discuss a substantial feature I used in the interviews before reflecting on the course of the interviews.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, I incorporated an additional aspect to the interviewing process to elicit information from the respondents - namely I used images during the interviewing process. This approach brings about a significant alteration in data-collection through a research interview. The following section will provide a theoretical overview of utilising visual

methodology in social research, more specifically how it contributes to the research at hand and explains the practical implications for doing so.

4.6 VISUAL METHODOLOGY

From the methodological perspective, this research incorporates a relatively innovative method – photo elicitation. For the purpose of this study, image-elicitation would be more accurate, since not all the pictures used during the interviews were photos, but similar theoretical grounds apply here as well. Although the amount of literature on photo elicitation has been growing steadily and the method is becoming more adapted into the realm of social and cultural research (anthropology, ethnography, sociology), the images used in the process of gathering data for this research serve a slightly different purpose than seen in most previous research utilising this methodology. This refers to the fact that most commonly photo elicitation interviews are based on the respondent taking the photos or the photos being taken in collaboration between the researcher and respondent. The following section will explain why a visual perspective has been included in this research and will then provide an overview photo elicitation, its role and implications in the interviewing process.

Gillian Rose (2001: 6) has claimed that the visual has become a significant part of how people construct the social world in a contemporary Western society (TV, posters, journals, photos, technology etc.) and that much meaning is conveyed by visual images. However, the views that these images offer are never transparent windows on to the world – they interpret the world (Rose 2001: 6). The images can be used to help interpret the world of the participants (i.e. when they take the photos themselves) and the world is also interpreted through images (i.e. how the respondents interpret the images).

Visual research methods are argued to be especially effective in generating evidence that other methods (e.g. interviews, surveys) cannot (Rose 2013: 28). Looking specifically at the interviews, it is claimed that things are discussed in the talk about visual materials that do not get discussed in talk-only interviews (Rose

2013: 28). Since the activity of observation is inextricably linked to our way of thinking, imagination, memory of past experiences and our ability to combine these elements (Stanczak 2007), exploring how respondents interpret certain images could have significant additional value to the data received through an interview.

4.7 PHOTO ELICITATION

In preparation and during the interviewing process, the concepts, and language and meanings attached to the themes brought into the discussion might be understood by respondents in a different way. The implications of whether the researcher comes from a similar cultural background can be helpful in grasping the meanings ascribed by people from the same wider community, but a difference will remain as to how a researcher studying a particular field and the respondents perceive various aspects of the social world and the meanings they attach to them. There are certainly challenges for the research process of coming from the same community, and the implications this had for the research at hand will be discussed in more detail in the section on the interview process.

Photo-elicitation, or image-elicitation in this case, can help with some of these issues by providing a way to decentre the narrative and offer a way for the respondents to discuss various aspects more on their own terms, even though certain limitations still remain within this context (e.g. perception of what is expected of them, the choice of images).

Although referring more to people who do not share a cultural background, Douglas Harper (2002) has highlighted the usefulness of photo elicitation in conducting social research in saying that:

> "there is the need, described in all qualitative methods books, of bridging gaps between the worlds of the researcher and the researched. Photo elicitation may overcome the difficulties posed by in-depth interviewing because it is anchored in an image that is understood, at least in part by both parties. […] If the interview has been successful, the understanding has increased through the interview process." (Harper 2002: 20).

Harper also asserts that the 'elicitation interviews connect core definitions of the self to society, culture and history' and can therefore be useful for researchers in not assuming how audiences define hegemonic or other ideological messages – they must study how members of that audience themselves interpret (accept, contest or reject) their intended messages (Harper 2002: 13-19). In other words, images provided by the researcher can be a tool 'to uncover, reveal and convey deeper aspects of habitus' (Sweetman 2009 in Rose 2013: 28). In this way, visual research methods are often used to uncover the implicit knowledges in everyday practices as most studies with visual materials focus on the ordinary and everyday (Rose 2013: 28).

In addition to images helping to uncover the ordinary and everyday knowledge of the social actors, images presented by the researcher during the interview can also elicit a *different kind* of information, as argued by Pretto (2015):

> "The photographs presented by the researcher are used as a basis for the interview and play a specific role in it, as they help the interviewees recall memories - or to reflect on various issues - that, without images, would not come to their minds (Banks 2001 in Pretto 2015: 172). This happens because 'the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words. These may be some of the reasons the photo elicitation interview seems like not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information.' (Harper 2002: 13 in Pretto 2015: 172)."

There are multiple ways in which photo elicitation can be utilised in socio-cultural research. The images can be introduced to the interviewing process by the researcher, they can be taken by the respondent, or the images can be created in collaboration between the researcher and respondent. Photo elicitation has been widely used to research children and marginalised groups and give them a voice to express meaning through this method. Usually the images used in these studies are either taken by the respondent or created in collaboration between the researcher and respondent. This research, however, follows a slightly different path as I as the researcher was the one responsible for choosing and introducing the images to the interview. Also, the images used in the process were not all photographs, but I also used cartoons from the media and other images which does

not alter the aim of the interview and follows the same theoretical foundations as *photo* elicitation. The rationale behind choosing the images will be explained in more detail below with introducing the images I used. The expectation was to receive different, more expanded empirical data in comparison to what the more traditional understanding of a talk-based interview produces.

For this research, the images were utilised as a way to prompt discussion about the participants' perceptions of Estonian 'normality' in relation to national identity. The images chosen for this research were, as Pretto calls them, based on the *etic* point of view of the researcher in a sense that they reflected 'constructs, depictions and analysis formulated according to the conceptual terms established by the scientific community' (Pretto 2015: 170-171). The aim of sharing these *etic* understandings was to find out the alternative (or similar) meanings held by the interviewee i.e. to uncover the *emic* point of the interviewee, which Pretto defines as 'the categories of thought of the 'native subject', his/her view of the world, the local/popular notions and concepts shared by his/her culture or by the human group that is being studied' (Pretto 2015: 170-171).

4.8 IMAGES USED FOR THIS RESEARCH

What needs to be addressed here, however, is the choice of images, which in itself already directs the themes and flow of the interview. As briefly noted in the introduction to this chapter, I chose the images based on themes in the existing academic literature on Estonian national identity constructions. Three larger themes were presented in some way through the images: the narrative of 'return to Europe'; Russia as the significant Other; and conflicting history narratives. These themes were then complemented with images about themes that could contribute to further discussion on Estonian national identity – e.g. nation-branding, possible impact of the economic crisis, perceptions of Estonian politics.

The images selected for the interview process were taken from various sources. The cartoons depicting some of the core themes addressed in the academic

research and important events which might prompt discussion surrounding these themes were taken from an Estonian daily newspaper *Postimees*. The cartoons usually represent an exaggerated depiction of events or people for comic effect. The ones chosen for the interviews represented, in my view, the top-down narrative of the Estonian political elite and media in a relatively ironic way and I decided to use these images to try to understand whether and how the categories of thought on these topics differed among the respondents (and myself) and try to bring forward these expectedly complex understandings of national identity in a more nuanced to gain a better insight into Estonian 'normality'. I searched for cartoons which would provide a relatively broad overview of the topical events. *Postimees* was not the only source I went through for this purpose. I also examined the cartoons from another Estonian daily newspaper *Päevaleht* and (not intentionally) ended up with choosing cartoons from only *Postimees*, which appeared to encapsulate broader political events in Estonia while the ones in *Päevaleht* were too focused on the specific daily news at the time to be used in the interviewing process. As explained in the section on media analysis, only Estonian newspapers were incorporated here, as they are seen to depict the dominant top-down Estonian 'normality' within themes of national identity and therefore provide a basis for exploring the relationship between the top-down narratives and everyday understandings.

I chose three main timeframes for conducting the search for the cartoons. First, the timeframe surrounding Estonia's accession to the EU and NATO to represent the 'return to Europe' narrative (01/04/2004-31/05/2004); second, the relocation of the Bronze Soldier to represent the conflicting history narratives with Russia (01/04/2007-31/05/2007) and facilitate discussion on Russia as the Other; and third, Estonia entering the Euro zone at the beginning of 2011 to represent the deepening integration with EU and the economic aspects related to this (01/12/2010-31/01/2011) which could help with uncovering the effects of the economic crisis on the national identity narrative in Estonia.

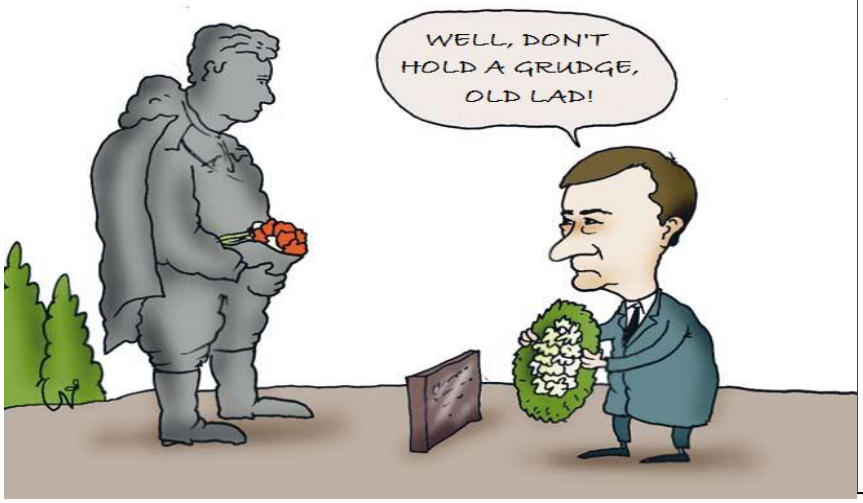
I ended up choosing four cartoons to use during the interviews. I translated the texts in the cartoons from Estonian to Russian for the Russian-speakers and into English to present here. A brief justification for the use of each image is given in the textboxes.

The cartoon was chosen to facilitate discussion on themes of security surrounding Estonia's accession to the EU and NATO.

Figure 2.Cartoon. Source: Postimees 11/05/2007

This cartoon was chosen to facilitate discussion on conflicting history narratives (note 'liberate' by Russia) and again themes of security.

Figure 3. Cartoon. Source: Postimees 05/05/2007



This image could help prompt discussion on the Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, the Reform Party and the events surrounding the removal of the Bronze Soldier.

Figure 4. Cartoon. Source: Postimees 07/05/2007

The introduction of the Euro and references to the economic crisis could be discussed with this image.

Figure 5. Cartoon. Source: Postimees 02/01/2011

The Bronze Night looting. This is the most iconic photo of the Bronze night incident from the Estonian media. It was used as an illustration for many articles touching upon the looting during the Bronze Night.

Figure 6. The Bronze Night looting. Source: Postimees 27/09/2009

Liberty Cross was installed in Liberty Square in the centre of Tallinn in 2009 to commemorate the War of Independence 1918-1920. This image was used in connection to the conflicting narratives of history and the removal of the Bronze Soldier from the city centre two years earlier.

Figure 7. Liberty Cross. Source: Internet search

The political elite in Estonia in 2013. From the left, Edgar Savisaar, mayor of Tallinn and the leader of the main opposition party (Centre Party), Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the President of Estonia, Andrus Ansip, the Prime Minister, leader of the Reform Party. Placed in the interview with the idea to further discussion on Estonian politics in general.

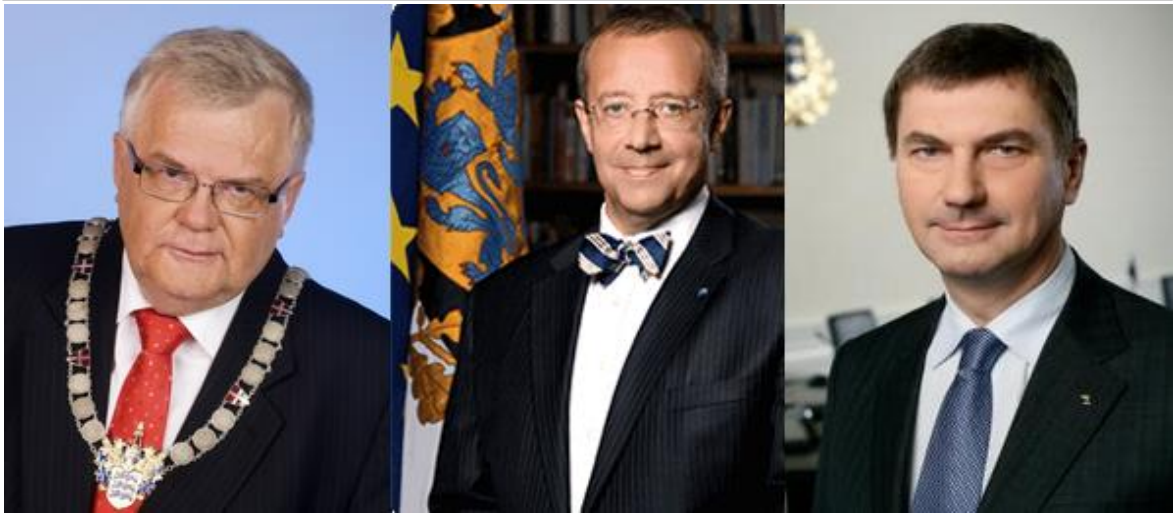


Figure 8. The political elite in Estonia. Sources: http://www.tallinn.ee; http://www.president.ee; http://valitsus.ee (accessed 20.11.2012)

Estonian political elite vol 2. Former Estonian presidents since 1992. On the left, Lennart Meri, and on the right, Arnold Rüütel. These images were chosen to facilitate discussion on Estonian politics in general and to elicit discussion on how people perceive the development of the country since the 1990s.

Figure 9. The political elite in Estonia. Source: http://www.president.ee (accessed 20.11.2012)

Estonian nation-branding logo developed in 2002. This image was introduced to bring in some reflections as to perception (or desired perception) of Estonia from the outside.

Figure 10. Welcome to Estonia brand logo. Source: Internet search

Introduction of the Euro. Chosen to facilitate reflections on the new currency adopted in Estonia in 2011, belonging to the Euro zone in general, the role of Estonian Kroon in national identity and any further economic issues the respondents might be reminded of.

Figure 11. Estonian Euro coin. Source: Internet search

This image of the riots in Greece during the economic crisis was used to further the discussion on economic woes and how the European Union dealt with this. This image didn't work as planned in the interviews, since most respondents thought it was taken during the Bronze Night riots in Tallinn.

Figure 12. Protests in Greece. Source: Internet search

As discussed earlier, the images were brought into the interviewing process in order to facilitate discussion and were not intended to encompass the entire range of aspects related to national identity. The objective was to gain a more in-depth understanding of the respondents' lived experiences of the depicted events/aspects and how the top-down constructions of these have been contextualised on a grassroots level to get a better sense of their 'normality'.

Before the start of the interview, I laid out the images usually on a table in front of the respondent and went over the information sheet about my research to make sure they understood what the aim of the research was (in general terms) and what their role in it was. No specific themes regarding Estonian national identity construction were discussed prior to the interview to allow the respondents to convey their thoughts and perceptions about the images and to try to limit directing the discussion according to my own point of view.

It was not only the intrinsic richness of the data that I was interested in with introducing images into the interviewing process. From a practical point of view, I expected the images to support the whole process of conducting the interview by helping to facilitate asking questions and providing structure. The use of images in the interviewing process also provided focus for the respondents and lessened awkwardness through that.

In short, adding a visual perspective to the interviewing process can enable analytical differentiation, empirical expansion and can deepen our knowledge of the complexities of post-accession Estonian 'normality'. Utilising visual materials in this research helped to open up internal worlds and interpretations of participants regarding issues that I might not have thought to probe, it facilitated asking questions and provided structure and focus for the interviews, which will be discussed next.

4.9 STRUCTURING THE INTERVIEW

As an interview is a conversation with a structure and purpose (Kvale 1996: 6), the structure plays a significant role in how the purpose is achieved. The interview structure for this research was largely based on the images introduced during the interview, which as stated earlier, principally followed the main themes brought forward in previous research. Follow-up questions were asked according to the topics addressed and responses received by the participants. The interviews can be described as unstructured since they were largely based on a few key questions I had prepared and followed the participants' reactions and thoughts to the images laid out in front of them. For example, I inquired further about the effects of joining the EU and NATO; both in terms of internal developments in Estonia and external ones in the international community. Dependent on how the respondents brought forward relations with Russia, I asked about perceptions of Russia and about their understandings of present-day (2013) state of relations with Russia. These are just a few instances of broader themes and as said, the nuances of each interview were dependent on how respondents interpreted the images. The images provided some structure, but the questions were not predetermined, and the interview took the format of a discussion rather than a series of questions and answers. The interviewing process would follow the themes that the images elicited. The main intention behind using this format of interview was to allow the social realities of the respondents to come through as well and fully as possible.

4.10 REFLECTIONS ON THE SETTING AND PROCESS OF THE INTERVIEWS

In order to provide more context as to how the interviews were conducted and also bring out some background for understanding the interview data used in the analysis, I will discuss and provide a few examples as to how I made contact with my respondents. Since I found this process to be informative for future reference, I will describe a couple of elements from this process in more detail.

As one might expect, I attempted to prearrange interviews via email with respondents from the areas outside Tallinn (having found respondents through acquaintances and snowballing there), so I could visit these locations when suitable for them. I received the contacts for potential respondents from various sources. For example, I received a contact in Narva from my supervisor, Professor David Smith, for someone he had previously been in touch with during his own research visit to Narva.

Another relevant example, which I will discuss in some more length here, is how I found respondents in Setomaa, in South East Estonia. Since I didn't have any established contacts in this area, I got in touch with a head of a public institution, which cannot be named to protect their anonymity, in Värska in the hope that either they would be able to partake in my research or could direct me to someone who would be willing to do so. The information for this was publicly available on the website and I contacted them via email. I included the information sheet (see Appendix B) as an attachment to the email. Since I didn't hear back from them, I sent an email to a different contact I found on the internet but failed to hear back from them as well. In the end, I decided to simply drive down to Värska and see if I could locate anyone willing to participate in my research.

Being a native Estonian made it relatively easy for me to approach people there. I decided to try the same public institution that I had emailed and happened to come across the person who had received my email. As I introduced myself, they told me they had received the email, but were not really sure what they could possibly have to contribute on this topic and had not known how to reply. However, after meeting me and discussing the objectives of the research in person, they were happy to participate, even though I made it clear that there

was no obligation to do so and that I would be very grateful if they could simply point me towards some possible respondents within the area. This experience demonstrated that the impersonal email and the official information sheet with a foreign 'Western' university, University of Glasgow, header and the relatively formal language used in it, which I take full responsibility for, made them uncomfortable and was therefore not conducive to making an effective contact with a potential respondent. This raises several questions regarding the ethical procedures in preparing for the fieldwork and the formal requirements for the information sheet.

One also needs to consider the impact this approach has on the respondents. In theory, the respondents should be provided with sufficient time prior to the interview to understand the aims of it, usually by reading the information sheet, and make 'an informed decision' about participating in the research. Whereas approaching people in person might place more pressure on them to take part in the interview – possibly demonstrated by the fact that only a few people said no to being interviewed when approached like this – and therefore create an ethically problematic situation.

However, even when having contacted the then future respondents before and sent them all the necessary materials, I discovered at the beginning of the interviews that most of them had not read the information sheet and asked for a brief overview of the aims of my research. While doing this in person made the respondents seemingly feel more at ease with the whole process and made the setting of the interview therefore more conducive to gaining rich data from it, several issues should be highlighted here. First, the latter situation most likely placed the respondents under even more pressure, since they probably felt it would have been 'impolite' to withdraw their consent at this point (even though they were constantly reassured that they can do this before and at any point during the interview). Second, the information sheet I had for conducting this research appeared to fail in its task of informing the respondents meaningfully regarding the research objectives and should be reconsidered when conducting future research. In a way, the format used for providing this information caused ethical issues in itself, because it distanced the respondents from engaging with the substance of the research. Since the interview questions were not (usually) of

sensitive nature then the ethical implications of finding respondents in this manner are perhaps slightly more downplayed, but nevertheless significant within the qualitative paradigm.

I argue that this was especially the case in rural areas, since I had fewer issues establishing contacts in Tallinn, even though most of the respondents there were secured through prior contacts and 'snowballing'.

Another element which deserves to be reflected upon is how the respondents themselves viewed my research, which helps develop further context for the data received from the interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, it was not difficult to see that many respondents had hesitations as to what kind of information to provide and understanding how their opinions and perspectives contributed to the research, even though this was explained in the beginning and, at times, during the interview. In this context, it is relevant to consider what the respondents understood as 'research' and how this might affect how they answered certain questions. To oversimplify the matter to an extent, many of the respondents appeared to struggle with the idea of talking about their thoughts and memories regarding the images, since they didn't seem to consider these relevant enough to be included in 'research'.

Analysing this after conducting the interviews, I can posit two possible reasons for this. First, the societal constructions of what 'research' entails appeared to be perceived in quantitative terms. This means that the respondents' perception of 'research' can impact the answers they provide if they are consciously attempting to provide these in accordance with their understanding of quantifiable research. Second, and related to this but looking at the same issue more broadly, many respondents might have not considered their lived experiences interesting or relevant enough in general to discuss these in length (even though they were encouraged to do so). However, the longer the interview lasted, the more comfortable most of the respondents appeared to become with sharing various (relevant and, at times, also irrelevant) information with me.

Regarding the previous description, and highlighting also some of the challenges of conducting interviews with Russian-speakers in Estonia while being a native

Estonian myself, I think it is valuable to provide an example of what I would term a 'failed' interview that took place in Narva and the possible reasons behind this. I met the respondent in Narva through the contact I had there. It was clear that she did not feel comfortable with the interview and had prepared her answers in advance (I had provided an information sheet for her in Russian a few hours before we agreed to hold the interview), reading them out and barely adding anything when asked follow-up questions. The interview lasted 15 minutes as opposed to the average of ca 1 hour. She appeared worried both about her factual knowledge and about saying something 'wrong'. The latter appeared to me to consume the entire interview, even though all the respondents were always assured prior to the interview that there are no right or wrong answers here. My sense was that her unwillingness to share her opinions and attempting to provide answers she considered 'neutral' had to do with her understanding of what an Estonian-speaker might expect to hear, indicating that in her perception this difference existed, and since her perception of this had not been articulated in these terms in her everyday life (perhaps just a cognitive difference), she felt uneasy about adding anything to the prepared material.

This was not the only case in Narva, where I could sense some precariousness in discussing the social and political aspects of Estonian national identity constructions. There were incidences where I could sense that the respondent was not expressing their opinion directly, because they were aware of the possible differences in political preferences reported in the media among Estonian- and Russian-speakers. For example, a couple of respondents clearly stopped themselves from saying anything negative about the then Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, even though their line of thought was directing towards it.

4.11 REFLECTIONS ON MY POSITION AS A RESEARCHER

Having already discussed some elements related to my position as a researcher in conducting the data collection (e.g. recruiting participants, case in Narva), this section seeks to provide further context for the data I received from the interviews.

Embedded within the research process are relationships of power and language that all researchers must face. No matter how hard one tries to prepare ahead for the interview process, the ability to adapt and reorganise requires time and experience, not to mention good background knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings, sensitivity to the general cultural, political and historical context of the respondent and sensitivity to the situation at hand. The power dynamics in an interview had some bearing on the interviewing process (especially the case in Narva highlighted earlier), but as stated above, the respondents in various regions in Estonia appeared relatively comfortable with engaging in discussion on these topics with me. Also, as indicated above, the images helped provide focus for the respondents and helped provide a more relaxed setting for the interview.

However, a question that deserves further consideration here is language. The interviews were conducted (or at least offered to be conducted in two cases) in the respondents' native languages – Estonian or Russian. Since Estonian is my own native language, this allows for greater flexibility and understanding throughout the interviewing process and makes it easier to ask follow-up questions according to the responses. However, the Russian-language interviews were somewhat hampered because my level of Russian is lower than my native language. Therefore, the interview data I received from the Russian-language interviews is at times less nuanced than the data I received through the Estonian-language interview, although the difference does not affect the analysis significantly. Here, the images were very helpful in allowing the respondents to discuss the themes as they viewed them in a relatively non-directive manner as opposed to answering questions where my understandings and meanings had been mixed with my constrained Russian language skills.

4.12 TRANSLATING AND TRANSCRIBING THE INTERVIEWS

To continue with the issue of language, another element, which deserves some discussion here, is translation. Since the data collected was in Estonian and Russian, and the thesis is written in English, the process of translation is relevant to understanding the outcome of this research. Translation in the classic sense is

the replacement of text in a source language by text in a target language equivalent in meaning. However, the transfer of cultural meanings, embedded in linguistic expressions, from one language to another constitutes one of the most challenging tasks of translation and it is basically impossible to achieve full equivalence of meaning in translation (Müller 2007: 207). Different languages structure the world in different ways and translations constantly suffer from not being able to convey the richness of connotations (Müller 2007: 207).

For this research, I made the interpretations from the two languages used for collecting data and gave them the English equivalents. This process is deeply subjective and even though I was careful in my attempt to convey the connotations and meanings as closely to the original language as possible, at times, this was a difficult task. For cases, where I found it very difficult to convey the connotations of the original language, I placed the initial word/expression in brackets to allow for greater transparency in this process.

I transcribed the Estonian-language interviews myself. On average, it took about 8 hours to transcribe 1 hour of the interview audio. Even though this is a time-consuming process, the process of analysis already somewhat starts from that point. Engaging slowly and steadily with the interview brought forward quite a few themes, wordings and subtleties that I would not have noticed and did not notice during the course of the interview. I used capital letters for louder voice, indicated slightly longer pauses in brackets and shorter ones with three dots. Sighs, body language and other non-verbal aspects were all included in brackets. The Russian-language interviews were transcribed by two Russian-speaking Estonians who had previous experience in transcribing research interviews. The transcripts I received from them were done in a similar manner to my own, and they had included comments about double-meanings, various expressions and other elements they deemed necessary to point out.

The audio files which were forwarded to the transcribers did not include any indication of who the respondents were to protect the anonymity of the respondents. That was one of the reasons I decided to use two transcribers as there was a chance the first one might have recognised one of the respondents due to their profession. Since there is always a possibility of mistakes in

conducting precise transcribing, I checked the quality of the transcriptions with comparing them to the audio files. The transcribers also signed a confidentiality form (see Appendix D) confirming that the audio files will be deleted after the transcriptions are completed.

4.13 ANALYSING INTERVIEW DATA

Effective analysis is based on theorising about data using a consistent model of social reality (Silverman 2000: 151-152). Generally, I would be interested in a pattern of data, and this is where coding comes in. In order to find this pattern, a thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts. Thematic coding aims at developing a theory starting from the distribution of perspectives on a certain issue or process (Seidman 1998: 100). It has to be said that themes are not something within the data to be revealed but depend upon the choices that I as a researcher make. Theoretically the transcripts need to be approached with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and interest from the text (Seidman 1998: 100), and this is what I attempted to do with the transcripts from my fieldwork.

The analysis of the interview data was done using NVivo qualitative analysis software. In the first level of analysis, I was looking for larger repetitive themes emerging from the data and the focus was on cross-case aspect. These themes were coded into nodes in NVivo. The larger emerging repetitive themes were coded into parent nodes and a range of sub-nodes added to encapsulate the variety of ways and possible new angles that these topics were discussed in the interview data (see Appendix E for an example of the process). NVivo was a useful programme for doing the first-level analysis given the volume of the material analysed for this research. The second level of analysis was done on paper using the larger themes already established in NVivo to develop these larger themes into interpretive analytical frames which formed the basis for my empirical findings.

A danger with developing descriptive themes into interpretative themes is forcing the excerpts into categories already made up in one's mind earlier and this does not allow for the themes to emerge from the experiences of the participants (Seidman 1998: 110). In conducting the analysis, I had to be conscious about noticing themes already established in the academic literature, aspects that I might have drawn more attention to myself during the interview process, statements which might be incompatible with my own political point of view etc. However, this does not mean that these issues are not of interest or relevance for the research.

4.14 TOP-DOWN MEDIA DISCOURSE

For the purpose of this study and its main aim of understanding constructions of 'normality', I also analysed some Estonian media sources to pull out the top-down dominant discourse on the themes mentioned above in order to understand how the dominant discursive constructions related to national identity have been internalised on the grassroots level.

As to the material used from the media, I searched for keywords 'Europe', 'EU', 'Russia' and 'values' in the online archives of *Päevaleht* and *Postimees*, two widely read Estonian dailies. I only included the opinion sections of these dailies since the daily press releases and news stories were not the focus of this research – what I was looking for was how themes of identity were discussed. I did a similar search for *Õhtuleht*, the most widely read Estonian daily newspaper, but since it can be considered more of a tabloid, the search results provided little valuable for the present research, especially given that the primary data collection was through interviews with the media analysis supplementing this.

For the online archive searches, I used the same timeframes as I did searching for the cartoons (01/04/2004-31/05/2004; 01/04/2007-31/05/2007; 01/12/2010-31/01/2011), added a month from during the Georgian War in 2008 (01/08/2008-31/08/2008) to look at the security dimension and the process of Othering Russia,

and two months in 2014 (01/05/2014-30/06/2014) for addressing the top-down discourse on the ten-year anniversary of Estonia belonging to the EU and NATO.

Media analysis has a supplementary role in this research, it provides reference points for various aspects that the respondents discussed and is utilised mostly in the first and second empirical chapters (Chapter 5 and 6) as the everyday aspects discussed in Chapter 7 surfaced during the course of the interviews.

4.15 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodology adopted for addressing the main research questions at hand. The combination of methods used for this research include analysis of secondary sources, unstructured interviews incorporating an innovative visual aspect and media analysis to supplement the primary interview data and illustrate the top-down discourse on various themes related to national identity in Estonia. The chapter demonstrates how these methods are useful in bringing out the multiple perceptions for gaining an in-depth understanding of how post-accession 'normality' is constructed in Estonia. The interviews also incorporated a visual aspect as I used photo elicitation in order to receive different, more expanded empirical data. The choice of images, guided by previous academic research, was taken to depict the dominant discursive practices in Estonia on these topics and therefore provided a very useful basis for bringing out the complex relationship between the top-down narratives and everyday understandings. The interview data was also supplemented by Estonian media analysis which provided further evidence for fully engaging with the relations between the images of identity offered by political elites or the media and 'everyday discourses' about nations and national identities as discussed in Chapter 2. Examining these relations is the basis for bringing out the ideational collection of thicker points of reference which are seen to constitute the post-accession 'normality' in Estonia.

The chapter also discusses the theoretical and practical implications for utilising these methods, it explains the sampling process, and reflects on the processes of

doing the interviews and my position as a researcher within it as well as how the transcribing, translating and analysis were conducted for answering the research questions. This detailed overview of the methods and analysis is key to understanding how the data guides the following empirical chapters.

CHAPTER 5. ESTONIA IN EUROPE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 3, during the 1990s the 'return to Europe' was defined in 'classic' collective security terms, as a way of underpinning the security of a sovereign Estonian nation-state, restored along inter-war lines (see Smith 2003a; Lehti 2006; Lehti and Smith 2003; Mälksoo 2009). Themes of security, and not only in the classical sense, remain an important aspect in the Estonian identity-building process, and this will be focused on in more detail in Chapter 6 when discussing Estonian identity-building in relation to Russia. However, this chapter is more about exploring how the internal essence of 'Europe' is understood and discussed, a decade after Estonia had become part of this entity. The underlying element that came across from the respondents interviewed for this research for understanding Europe a decade since joining the European Union appears to lie in the broad idea of shared values. This broad understanding echoes the official value discourse of the European Union and can be seen to come through in discussions on various elements when discussing belonging to Europe or being a part of the EU. However, the main argument in this chapter is that the idea of these shared values and belonging to Europe have been taken in without much self-reflection – demonstrating the taken-for-granted 'normality' of these shared values (see previous discussion in Chapter 2). By far the most significant finding in this area was how the benchmark for framing these values has shifted from glorification of the interwar period to the beginning of the 1990s and the early period of regaining independence. The data from this research demonstrates that there has indeed been a change in the *temporal* narrative of the model Eglitis proposed in the early 2000s for understanding Estonian 'normality' (see Chapter 2, section 2.5). Another original and valuable finding from the evidence collected for this study shows that

a new North-South axis had emerged in perceptions of Europe in Estonia. This new discovery enhances our understanding of how spatial perceptions of 'normality' have also changed within Estonian identity-building processes following EU and NATO accession in 2004.

The chapter is broken broadly into two sections – the idea of Europe and belonging to the EU - with threads of temporal and spatial 'normality' in Estonia running across them. Since accession to the EU provided an official validation for Estonia's renewed belonging to Europe, many overlapping elements can be discerned in the ways that respondents talk about 'Europe' and the 'European Union'. Yet, a relatively clear conceptual difference is also apparent in their use of the respective terms, and this is reflected in the title of this chapter. While 'Europe' is seen as more fluid category based on values, with boundaries drawn according to perceived cultural differences, the European Union is more commonly understood in terms of fixed rules and regulations applied to formal member states. This does not mean that these terms are completely separable from each other and occasionally when discussing the idea of 'Europe' the respondents would use them interchangeably. However, when asked about or focusing more on the EU, they did not conflate this with the idea of Europe. Therefore, a separate section will be dedicated to the perception of EU in the latter part of this chapter.

5.2 'EUROPE' IN ESTONIA

In order to provide some context for understanding the Estonian population's general approach to Europe and the relevance of these values, it is necessary to highlight the high rates of approval for the EU that dominate within the society, which as explained in earlier chapters (1, 2 and 3) officially validated Estonia's place back in 'Europe'. Broadly speaking, belonging to the EU is not challenged in the Estonian society. By 2013, when the interviews were conducted, Estonia had been a member of the EU for nearly a decade, and the approval rates for EU were among the highest in the union.

An annual survey commissioned by the Government Office in Estonia states that 80% of the Estonian population supported the European Union in 2013 (2012 – 74%; 2014 – 84%; 2015 – 78%). In 2013, only 10% of the Estonian population viewed the image of the EU as negative or fairly negative (34% positive or fairly positive and 55% neutral), sharing a 'first' place within the EU countries with Lithuania and Poland according to the Eurobarometer 80 survey. In addition to that, support for the European common currency, the Euro, has grown significantly in the years since its adoption, reaching 83%, the highest among EU countries, in 2014-2015 (rising from ca 70% in 2011) (Eurobarometer 80, 2013). Even though the Eurosceptic camp had some traction in the run-up to the EU referendum in Estonia in 2003 (33.2% voted 'No'), Estonia has been one of the most pro-EU countries in Europe in recent years. These high approval ratings for the EU, and through that also for the 'idea of Europe', are not surprising and have several causes, ranging from themes of culture and history to economy and peace discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. However, when examining specifically the idea of Europe, the respondents mostly appeared to have a perception of shared values as the basis for this construction. Shared values is a concept which in its broadness can encompass all of these themes and should be explored in more detail.

5.2.1 THE OFFICIAL EUROPEAN VALUE DISCOURSE

There appear to be several layers in how people perceive Europe and belonging to it. The value dimension that has been used to construct Europe from the top-down level has provided a framework for the respondents to negotiate in relatively abstract terms the political-cultural space within which Estonia should be situated and the respective Others who do not belong in the similar space. At the same time, the economic dimension through which Estonia's national identity has been/is being conveyed since re-independence also provides a framework for the everyday constructions of national identity. As previous academic literature has demonstrated and the data gathered for this study shows, these frameworks conflate, but also occasionally diverge, to a degree to form a basis for how the people in Estonia negotiate various themes in their everyday lives.

So, what are these shared European values and how does Estonia fit within them? Values are the main element in the European Union's founding principles and are constantly reiterated by various elites through numerous media channels. The official founding principles of the European Union list[7] the values that the union is based upon as respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. In 2004, a day before Estonia became an official member of the European Union, the Prime Minister at the time, Juhan Parts, accentuated the value dimension of the EU:

> "This union is based on values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and respect for human rights. These are the joint values of member states in a society of pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination. The goal of the European Union is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its nations." (Juhan Parts, Prime Minister, Eesti Päevaleht, 30.04.2004).

The idea of 'Europe' being based on these similar principles to the EU's appeared to have been adopted by the respondents in their perception of what Europe means and even though there was little reiteration of the same values *per se*, subscribing to what are *understood* to be European values and what it means to be European could be seen throughout the interview data. In a sense, the respondents appeared to have internalised an understanding of what it means to be a 'normal' European country. The 'idea of Europe' as put forward by the official discourse was more clearly expressed in the interviews by some of the respondents in Brussels, who are exposed to this narrative on a more day-to-day basis.

> "I think Europe has clearly certain shared values. Even though we have a lot of different views regarding details, then in the bigger picture, looking at the whole world, it is still a unity with shared values. All that democracy and socially caring worldview. All these basic liberties included." (Riina, 33, Brussels).

However, the articulation of these values did not seem to come through meaningfully in some other themes discussed during the interviews and the wider values listed above appeared still to be subject to interpretation dependent on

[7] Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union: "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail." http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT (accessed 10.05.2014)

the topic at hand. I claim here that one of the reasons for this is that the 'return to Europe' narrative had established a sense that Estonia already inherently embodied these European values and therefore little critical thought is put into how these values are reflected in the Estonian society, or in other parts of Europe for that matter.

5.2.2 SO WHAT IS EUROPE IN ESTONIAN IDENTITY-CONSTRUCTION?

As mentioned earlier, the 'return to Europe' narrative was embedded in the idea of achieving collective security, which emphasised Estonia's belonging to the European value structures already during the interwar period. This has been one of the fundamental aspects of Estonian national identity construction since becoming independent again in 1991 and became formally validated in 2004 when Estonia joined the EU and NATO, as discussed in the literature review chapter (see section 3.4).

It is not surprising that a loose term like 'values' appears to form a basis for how Europe is perceived in Estonia. 'Return to the Western World' had to be based on a more abstract idea since the Soviet period had dismantled all state structures, suppressed civil society and implemented a planned economy, which needed to be (re)built. However, the value dimension was not used simply as a means to an end. As mentioned in the literature review, Lauristin et al. (2007) have argued that Estonia somehow maintained elements of Western culture throughout the Soviet occupation and passed those sensibilities down through generations. However, they also point out some differences between value structures in Estonia compared to other Western or Northern countries (Lauristin et al. 2007) (see section 3.4).

In order to understand how the respondents perceive Europe and Estonia's place in it, it is important to differentiate between the top-down value discourse and the meaning attached to these values from the grassroots level. As said, the data from the interviews suggests some disparity between the top-down wider

discourse of 'European values' and how these values have been internalised on an everyday level.

The idea of European values appears to be a relatively loose one and interpreted according to context. As joining the European Union was seen as an elite-driven project, then validating the belonging to the European value structure through formal accession seems to have provided a justification for viewing Estonia within it, while at the same time leaving room for interpreting specific issues as seen fit. The reiteration of these terms in defining Europe demonstrates that the broad top-down narrative of shared European values has been taken in by the people; however, certain contradictions remain in terms of the meanings attached to this wider understanding of European values. Analysing these contradictions provides a good basis for understanding the identity constructions on a more detailed level. In looking at how people negotiate the substance of one of the main themes of Estonian identity constructions, i.e. 'return to Europe', a more comprehensive account of the idea of Europe in Estonia is brought forward.

The respondents appeared relatively uncritical in how these listed 'values' had been adopted in Estonia. For example, the idea of gender equality was utilised to reject certain cultures from the European space, but at the same time Estonia ranks highest among EU member states for gender pay gap with 26.9% in 2015[8].

> Me: "What are these European values?"
>
> Kaidi: "Well these that we have right now, the thing that we are doing here…"
>
> Me: "Can you name…"
>
> Kaidi: "Well, human rights of course. […] Suppressing women and this sort of – I can't even imagine how this could have happened historically […] and also to this time actually here in Europe, what goes on here quietly [like] mutilation (*lõikumine*) of women. Human rights. Equality. There should be no corruption. Well everything that we have here, see…" (41, Brussels).

Another respondent also highlighted how the idea of 'European' values is perceived through what it is not – Othered in terms of who does not belong or what European 'normality' is not. Her response also demonstrated the

[8]Second place is held by Austria with 21.7%, while the average in the EU was 16.5%. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en (accessed 21.10.2016).

interconnection of the perception of values and the European borders. Interestingly, it was the topic of women's rights that was seen as the most obvious dividing line as several respondents brought up this up in distinguishing between cultural realms.

> "I am very much afraid of Islamism. It just won't work for us. We are too different. I don't understand them. And they understand us even less. […] The worst is if they bring us that line [of thought] that a woman has to serve and worship the husband. […] And the woman can't eat at the table. She has to be on the floor. […] It'll take a very long time before they [Turks] have this European appreciation and perception of people. That a woman is also a person." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

While the quotes above form just a single example of this uncritical reflection on the values, it is also indicative of the wider approach to how belonging to the European value system can be interpreted as seen by the respondents as something that Estonia inherently belongs to without further reflexion – the implicit, common sense, taken for granted understanding which, as discussed in Chapter 2, forms a basis for everyday perceptions. These perceptions are brought to light more in the coming sections through people's reflexion of what these European values are not – the Others to the perceptions of values – through which people's constructions of their 'normal' values are more accessible for analysis.

There are several possible explanations for this taken-for-granted perception.

First, the official validation of Estonia's place in Europe by accession to the EU in 2004 demonstrated that all the necessary 'boxes were ticked' to *return to Europe*. This official recognition provides a background for the broader understanding that the European values, however they are interpreted by the respondents, are adhered to.

Second, the European values are constructed based partly on the normative understanding of what would have been had the Soviet occupation not taken place. In other words, the idea that if Estonia had not been occupied by the Soviet Union, it would be a 'normal' European state already embodying these 'European' values. From another perspective, 'return to the West' was also defined in terms of what it was not, which meant anything and everything that was seen as 'non-Soviet'. So, on the one hand, intrinsically embodying these values already from

the interwar years of independence and having also fulfilled the official criteria in becoming an EU member state and therefore proving its rightful place within the European value system, there seems to be little room for critically addressing these issues. The quote above demonstrates how Europe is being defined by reference to Others, to what it is not – the practices not viewed as belonging to the European value space - without any critical reflection on what Europe actually is.

Third, having had an 'abnormal' Soviet rule for half a century and still being a young, developing nation-state also provides protection from further criticism in these aspects. This period of isolation from Europe and the abnormal Soviet rule provide a unique perspective in Estonia on the current developments in 'Europe'. Having had 50 years of Soviet rule can be viewed as giving Estonia an opportunity to avoid some of the 'mistakes' made by the so-called old European countries. This has been especially relevant in Estonia's identity-building in terms of understanding Russia, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. In this sense, it has been argued, Estonia's identity takes on a 'more Western than the West' (Berg and Ehin 2009) dimension.

5.2.3 'TRUE' EUROPEAN ECONOMIC VALUES

The economic crisis, which hit Europe in 2008, had intensified the competition to define Europeanness, with, as I argue here, Estonia perceiving itself as 'true Europe' in terms of neoliberal market values from both the top-down dimension as well as on the grassroots level. Whereas the understanding of Russia in Estonia's national identity has taken on a 'more Western than the West' construction, then in terms of perceptions of economic values, the interview data showed that Estonia's identity-building had taken on a perception of upholding 'truer European' values, especially in reference to adopting austerity measures in time of crisis and countering the reactions in Southern European countries. As discussed in Chapter 1, the neoliberal approach can be seen as the *leitmotif* running through from the 1990s to present-day. The economic crisis provided an opportunity to reaffirm and reiterate these neoliberal principles, at a time when people might

have started to question their continued validity, and this has provided a strong continuation for the understanding that this approach is the only 'correct' way. In line with the neoliberal paradigm, and as can be seen from the analysis below, the blame for the financial crisis was placed on 'someone breaking the rules' – in contrast to Estonia's austerity approach as the only right or 'true' measures to adopt - and the financial/economic system as a whole was not questioned again.

Economic aspects have played their part as a fundamental element of identity construction in Estonia already from the 1990s. The so-called economic miracle was highlighted by the political elite in Estonia and utilised to demonstrate the country's uniqueness and acceptance by the West (Lehti 2007: 140). The economic success Estonia has had justifies the neoliberal reforms introduced in the 1990s and has remained largely unquestioned by the respondents and the mainstream media. Even more so, being hailed as the EU's 'poster child' for austerity measures, Estonia was largely viewed by the respondents as embodying the 'true' European values or being more European than especially the Southern European countries during and following the economic crisis.

This perception has brought about a new division for Europe in terms of Estonian identity construction, counterpoising the calm and rational 'North' to the temperamental and irrational 'South' within Europe itself. This is an interesting new dichotomy that appears to have surfaced in Estonia with the context of the economic crisis and which exists alongside the continuing normative gap between an increasingly authoritarian Russia and the Western liberal-democratic states.

5.2.4 NORTH-SOUTH AXIS IN 'EUROPE'

The Northern or Nordic identity has played a significant role in Estonian identity-construction since the beginning of 1990s. Even though - as discussed in Chapter 2 - there have been attempts to depict Estonia as a Nordic country, the economic crisis and the effect it had especially in Greece, Cyprus, Spain and Portugal (Ireland mentioned to a lesser extent) brought about a new North-South axis in conceptually dividing Europe and provided a useful Other in further consolidating

Estonia's Northern European identity aspect. This is looked at here from two sides. First, the positive framing of Estonia in light of the austerity measures adopted; and, second, how the respondents depict and oppose specifically Greece to Estonia during and after the economic crisis.

The adherence to the 'true' European values in terms of adopting austerity measures has been a particularly important element also in the top-down construction of demonstrating Estonia's European essence. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, in his Independence Day speech in 2014, shortly before Estonia celebrated its ten-year anniversary of joining the European Union (1 May 2014, second quote below), highlighted Estonia's strength and 'toughness' in demonstrating these European values during the economic crisis.

> "For the past six years Europe has been working on coming out of the financial and economic crisis. A crisis, which came about in the Euro zone due to insufficient toughness. The future structure and leadership of the European Union requires a whole new line of thought. Estonia, who in spite of the wear and tear of history (*vintsutuste kiuste*), has stood up and can offer a ground for such debates and develop the substance for future Europeanness." (Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Postimees, 24.02.2014).

> "The latest economic crisis was sort of a touchstone (*proovikivi*) for the European Union. Estonians passed the test. We proved that little and 'new' can be responsible and lasting, and that 'old' is not always like that." (Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Postimees, 01.05.2014).

The reference to the superior 'new' also indicates the aspect of 'fresh take' on how to deal with these difficulties. While the austerity measures adopted were supposed to be temporary in getting through a few years of the economic crisis, this narrative has become internalised as part of the Estonian identity. Ilves appears to use the word 'new' slightly ironically, to make a point about the fact that Estonia has always been a part of Europe and it has perhaps mistakenly been placed in the category of 'new' – as something that would need to get used to or learn the ways of Europe. Here he asserts that Estonia knew much better what Europe was supposed to do and managed to achieve it, while 'old' might have lost its way or in a way has always been less part of it than Estonia. What he appears to be saying is that the 'old' might have lost the way gradually (with having an easier life) during the time Estonia was occupied and don't see it themselves (reference in the first quote to 'new line of thought'), but since Estonia has a

'fresh' look onto things having regained independence only in 1991, then its perspective is better aligned with the 'true' European values.

The resilience and suffering narrative can be viewed as part of the collective perception of the Estonian nation state. Most of the key themes discussed below can be related back to this understanding. Being 'more Western than the West' implies having experienced the tragic and abnormal Soviet past and therefore having a more insightful understanding of Russian intentions than the West. As to being the 'true' Europe in terms of economic values and understanding the essence of Europeanness better than the 'South', there seemed to be little opposition to the austerity measures introduced in Estonia. The perception of historical suffering through various occupations and foreign rule has left an imprint on the Estonian mental map and has translated into taking pride in toughness and modesty during hard times. This is reiterated constantly through media channels and provides a background for better understanding the North-South dichotomy, which has developed as a result of the economic crisis.

> "We are one of the few European Union countries who has that experience in the memories of still living generations and who, due to that, can see European history and possible future scenarios from another angle than other EU states. Our natural modesty doesn't allow us to perhaps see that role that we carry in Europe because of our experience. Those, who have travelled the world, can value how extraordinary, important and fragile it is, what Europe represents in the world, and how big is the part countries like Estonia which reside on border of the free and totalitarian world, have in this." (Editorial, Postimees, 24/05/2014).

These themes were mirrored in a variety of ways at the societal level in my interview responses. From a more general outlook, the Northern aspect of Estonian national identity appears to have taken on a different perspective and was seen more through opposition to the South. The notion of being a Nordic or Northern country was of particular relevance prior to 2004 as discussed in Chapter 3, when it was mostly used to support the aim of joining the EU. After officially re-joining Europe, this dimension appears to be used by the respondents to counter the South in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

One of the main features applied in differentiating the North and the South was related to perceptions of mentality. This is not an unexpected finding given that

the hallmarks of the Nordic mentality have been highlighted throughout the 90s, with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Toomas Hendrik Ilves in a speech in 1999[9] detailing why Estonia is in fact a Nordic country. In it, he claimed that:

> "Brits, Scandinavians, Finns, Estonians consider themselves rational, logical, unencumbered by emotional arguments; we are businesslike, stubborn and hard-working. Our southern neighbors see us as too dry and serious, workaholics, lacking passion and joie de vivre. […] Clearly the case is to be made that these Protestant, high-tech oriented countries form a Huntingtonian subcivilisation, different from both its southern and eastern neighbors. The long, dark and cold winter nihts [original spelling] of Yuleland, inhospitable as they were to our ancestors' lives in agrarian societies, have produced a similar mindset and a culture geared to the demands of a modern, globalised economy."

A similar perception was detectable in how the respondents' claim that the 'southern neighbours'' excessive 'passion' and 'joie de vivre' in protesting austerity had contributed to steepening of the economic crisis. Since the neoliberal economic paradigm was not questioned by the respondents and seen as strictly in line with European values, this indicated that the already historical pragmatic, unemotional and hard-working approach is in fact the 'true' European way for meeting the demands of the globalised economy.

Quite a few of the respondents referred to these geographical factors to distinguish between the Southern temperament and the Northern calmness. The calmness, consensus, conformity and resilience that come from living in cold, harsh conditions are viewed as hallmarks of the Northern countries, including Estonia, and were mostly perceived as something to take pride in.

> "I think that our attitude towards life, our seriousness and complete emotionless at times have come from the living conditions in the Northern area." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

Another respondent expanded on the perceptions of Northern 'characteristics' which appeared to be seen as a source of self-esteem for the Estonian people. Since these discussion of Northerness came up mostly in reference to the economic crisis, the idea of a Nordic country, that the respondents' had, is in line with

[9] Speech by Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the Swedish Institute for International Affairs, 14 December 1999 (https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-nordic-country, accessed 12.03.2018).

Realo's (2017) point discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.5) that the Estonian perception of the Nordic does not coincide with what the Nordic is envisioned to entail in these respective countries - especially in terms of socially caring world view, which is not promoted by the neoliberal economic policies in Estonia. And a reconfiguration of the idea of what an Estonian Nordic entails can be seen in these characteristics – since the respondents did not appear to have any contradictions between highlighting the Nordic mentality as source of self-esteem for upholding the nationalist neoliberal principles discussed in Chapters 1 and 3 (and can be seen as partly encapsulated by the New Nordic concept put forward by the Reform Party in 2015).

> Eveli: "Well… I'm too much of a Northerner (*põhjamaalane*) to appreciate these different kind of characteristics like that (she laughs)."
>
> Me: "What do you mean by Northerner?"
>
> Eveli: "That you keep your emotions inside. Because I've seen in life how being emotional can be okay in communicating on a personal level, but on the diplomatic level, it does not bring you any benefits (*plusspunkte*)." (48, Brussels).

This understanding was highlighted further by discussing the protests against austerity measures in Europe. These protests were pitted against what the respondents appeared to consider Europe-proper related to the top-down ideas put forward by President Ilves (2014) and discussed earlier about how 'insufficient toughness' brought about the crisis in which Estonia managed to be responsible and lasting while the 'old' Europe somewhat failed this test signifying 'true' Europe.

As one respondent explained: "They have a different temperament and all. Well we've seen all sorts of things on TV that wherever, even Germany, where these things [protests] can happen but…[…] here in this quiet harsh Nordic country [it is unlikely]." (Merike, 49, Muhu island). While the South, especially in reference to Greece, was seen as the negative Other in defining Europeanness, the latter quote also demonstrates that even the epicentre of Europe – Germany – had failed the test of toughness to a degree. The protest activity was seen to signify the lack of resilience needed to get through these hard times – which Estonia, having the resolve due to historical circumstances and the calm, calculating but conforming temperament of the North, is seen to embody. These features are referred to by

Ilves as well when he suggests Estonia could offer the ground for developing the substance for future Europeanness. Put in a nutshell, they constitute what is seen as the European 'normality' which appears to have gotten lost to a degree even in the 'old' European countries.

The 'abnormal' economic irrationality in Greece was denounced by the respondents and the acts of protest seen themselves as something that hinders possible state progress and has little value on a personal level in line with the perception of how the passionate approach just does not fit the demands of the global economy, which Estonia, having gained the image of the 'shining star' discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, could express from a higher pedestal at that point. The protest actions fuelled the respondents' understandings of the Southern European 'temperament' and gave it negative context.

> "Well all these protests – they don't make life any better, do they. But well, if they are so hot-blooded people, I guess they have to let their steam out." (Eveli, 48, Brussels)

> "How could they possibly protest? I understand it from the human point of view – when all those benefits are taken away from you. Oh my god they had unbelievable things (*imepunktid*) what [I read from] newspapers or [saw] on television." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

The quote above from Aino demonstrates the perceptions of 'normality' on a collective level juxtaposed against the individual perspective. The implication here appears to be that the expectation of what is provided to you by the state ought to be lower, again reflecting the individualistic, limited state intervention neoliberal paradigm, which shapes perceptions of 'normality' in Estonia (even if there are contradictions in this as to how things should be run in Estonia). A similar point regarding personal versus collective approach was reiterated by a much younger respondent as he interpreted the discrepancies in perceptions between the North and South:

> "It has been surprising, but also given a good understanding that even though we're in Europe, the cultures are so different. Which is a good thing, and I don't want it to be similar everywhere. But how… I as a bystander swore and said that 'how do you not understand that you need to make these cutbacks and stuff? That we cannot go on like this. How do these people not understand that? […] But at the same time, when I took the

> other point of view and put myself in a similar situation, then I would have probably been on the streets with them." (Tarmo, 27, Tallinn).

The data supports the understanding that the Soviet experience has been and still remains central to shaping understandings of Estonian identity. At the same time, and as discussed above, this suffering provides a source for virtue and self-esteem – that the Estonians understand best what it really means to be European, and have the toughness to carry it through. In this sense, the European identity becomes an extension of national identity, of the Self, to be customised according to one's own needs and understandings.

> "Because the Estonian people are used to suffering (she laughs). Estonian people are modest. Also that nobody has this craving to go… well… rioting. All of our strikes are actually calm and peaceful. An Estonian is just not that kind of a person. (S)he will not go to riot. Or even more so to fight or something." (Katrin, 32, Tallinn).

> "But as to Greece, well the Greeks are emotional people and they are terrible (*hirmsad*) protesters. And they have been living above their means, but I still think that they will struggle (*rabelevad*) out of this [crisis]." (Leeni, 73, Tallinn).

The quote just above demonstrates that the perception of the Estonian approach being the only 'true' way – modest spending, balanced budget, limited benefits – appears to have been further consolidated by the financial crisis. The Greeks, who have been 'living above their means' had to find this out the hard way.

The fact that Estonia as a member state of the EU also contributed to the financial assistance of Greece was highlighted. The financial aid provided for Greece through the Economic Adjustment Programmes which Estonia participated in was seen as very unfair to the respondents in Estonia, where drastic austerity measures were introduced and silently endured by the people. One of the possible explanations for this relates back to the idea of suffering in the past and the perception that the 'older' EU member states that were seen as still richer would rather have an obligation to assist Estonia.

> "Her pension is ten times bigger than mine, and I'm assisting her?" (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

However, and I argue, even more so, this sense of unfairness can be attributed to the understanding of how austerity had become essential to demonstrating and thus defining 'Europeanness' in 1990s. The economic transition had become central to Estonians' understanding of what a 'normal Europe' is. The quote below demonstrates how the perception of austerity was rooted more in present-day perception of - us being responsible after the crisis and them not – and the recent past - Greeks having been irresponsible for years - than it is in any longer-term historical narrative of injustice and suffering.

> "I also feel that it is actually unfair to Estonians that we had to make significant cutbacks and we had to be the responsible ones, and at the same time Greece has been, well, irresponsible for years. […] On the governmental level we have had this honest approach that 'Yes, we have to make those cutbacks now, we'll make them and we will all make them together.' [But] in Greece they've simply been lying in the Euro zone - lying for years about their data. This cannot be acceptable." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

The austerity measures appeared to be universally adopted as the 'true' European way of dealing with the crisis. However, the contestation of what it means to be European was also evident in the data. As can be seen below, with the reference to 'acting as they do in Europe', which does not coincide with the essence of Estonianness seen and therefore seen to represent rather the 'abnormal' than 'normal' Europe that Estonia was returning to.

> "For some reason our [press] (*meie omad*) is so for this [protesting]. That our media [suggests] that [we] go out to the streets and the teachers went to the streets and the doctors went to the streets – 'Go to the streets and protest!'. I think it is lame (*nõme*) that we are provoking this all the time [that] 'Act as they do in Europe!' For what? An Estonian is modest, (s)he manages to talk things through, (s)he doesn't need to go out there and shout: "Ansip is stupid! Ansip is stupid!" or take some posters there." (Leeni, 73, Tallinn).

The following quote brings together the essence of how Estonianness was perceived in relation to the economic crisis and through that an understanding of what a 'true' Europe should also be. The Estonian is depicted here as a rational, balanced person who puts the future ahead of short-term gains. The respondent makes an interesting point with reference to the collective good ahead of the individual gains through talking about how protest activity hinders an already

bankrupt state. In this sense the state is still clearly placed ahead of the globalising individualistic motivations for material well-being.

> "Throughout time, an Estonian is used to live for what (s)he has earned. (S)he is not used to living in debt. This means that when you have more money, you can live a little freer, but at the same time you save up for rainy days. When times are tougher, then you don't go out very lightly to spend at the expense of your future, at the expense of your children or grandchildren. […] When your own country is on the verge of bankruptcy, there is no money left for anything, and then you're going to have a strike action on top of that, then this means that the bankruptcy will deepen." (Mart, 50, Brussels).

While this section discussed Estonia's self-positioning within Europe in terms of economic elements which have been a core identifying feature for Estonia since regaining independence in 1991 and provided an insight into the perceived divisions of North and South through that prism (entangled in the complex web of other Estonian national identity narratives), another key perception of Europe that needs to be addressed is how the respondents drew spatial boundaries to the idea of Europe through the value dimension.

5.3 WHERE EUROPE ENDS?: SPATIAL BOUNDARIES AND OTHERING

As to the spatial boundaries of 'Europe', the significant Others when discussing the value dimension were Russia and Turkey, with larger implications of what is considered Islamic culture. As discussed earlier in relation to how European values were defined in terms of what they are not, so too were the spatial limits of Europe drawn according to where this value field appeared to end. Othering Russia within the European value dimension will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. This is a highly relevant aspect of Estonia's identity construction and deserves to be dealt with in detail. However, when discussing the spatial boundaries of Europe and possible future enlargement, Turkey was also referred to as marking the 'cultural border' of Europe and was Othered/orientalised in that context.

> "We're just too different [with Turkey]. It's the same as taking Afghanistan into the EU." (Toomas, 39, Tallinn).

> "There should be similar values. How they treat women and all that. I think that [to include] Russia and Turkey – it would no longer be European Union. Russia is not Europe. […] Then it would no longer be [Europe] then it would be the Soviet Union. I think that Russia and Turkey don't belong here." (Kaidi, 41, Brussels).

In addition to the previously mentioned perceived value disparities within themes of equality and women's rights, the Turks were orientalised mostly within the religious discourse, but explanations were also taken from history. Turkey seemed to be depicted as clearly outside any notion of European space. This might be due to understanding 'Europe' in more rational terms and representing Turkey as inherently emotional in a negative sense.

> "The Turks, the old evil [ones]. All these things learned from the Turkish-Mongol times, how the Turks tortured… For some reason with Turks, I felt that when Turkey was announced as the country where Estonians go to holiday most often, then I thought that why on earth do they going to Turkey? […] I have a feeling that they are sort of evil. They shouldn't come then. […] If I had to vote now, I would vote no. […] I wouldn't want an Islamic country [in the EU]." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

The reasoning behind this line of thought was based largely on religious aspects and the potential threat of Islam mostly in the sense of cultural preservation rather than a direct security threat.

> "I am very much afraid of Islamism. It just won't work for us. We are too different. I don't understand them. And they understand us even less. […] (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

> "I can see here that this [integration between Muslims and European] doesn't really happen and [this] creates problems. All these incidents that we've had here, well pretty rough ones, like criminal ones, have unfortunately been initiated by the Muslims. […] What's common there, isn't [common] here in this community and this causes tensions." (Eveli, 48, Brussels).

While most respondents viewed the inclusion of Turkey into the European Union as having possible negative effects then there were voices arguing that the cultural differences might bring additional value.

> "I think it would be fun – let them have their community here. If we have the right to have our embassies and Estonian Houses and communities in every country then why shouldn't they? If we are in the European Union then moving within the European Union should be completely open in my

> opinion. […] Well from outside as well, but I think that there wouldn't be quite as many. Well there are some – we had the Filipinos who wanted to come [and] in my opinion many of them didn't want to stay. They actually wanted to move on from here." (Piret, 37, Tallinn).

Even though a relatively firm mental geographical line was drawn in the South-East, the European boundaries were not perceived as fixed in the East and the possibility of including some former Soviet Union republics such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia was left open, even if some reluctance can be seen in accepting the eastward expansion of European Union to include these countries. In a sense, these countries were framed as 'not quite Europe', as Estonia had been before officially validating its place within it in 2004.

> "They have this rather unstable internal politics. Although at the same time joining the European Union might bring some stability to them. But I still feel that one needs to sort internal issues out before joining the European Union, so that they wouldn't bring problems down to all other European Union countries. Although I am all for it that they would join the European Union, because that would make things better and bring solidarity." (Tarmo, 27, Tallinn).

> "Well Ukraine is likely. Well the political situation is as it is there currently [July 2013], but with their mentality and state [of mind] Ukraine would be a much more European candidate than Turkey." (Brussels, man, 40).

Since economic issues have been dominating the discussion on Europeanness as highlighted in the previous section, this became an important element in framing Europe spatially as well.

> "Ukraine should first become a capitalist country, then it could make this shift. It just doesn't fit at all right now. […] I viewed Georgia in a very positive way for a while and I had such high hopes for Georgia, but it's going to take a long time still before it'll be fit for Europe. It's night and day. Black and white. We are just so different. […] But Moldova? Let them develop a bit more is what I think." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

Some residual feelings of solidarity going back to the Soviet past could be detected in the responses for this reluctance to include these countries in the European space. People related to the situation of Ukraine (in 2013), Moldova and Georgia, and even though there was mainly economic concern that the EU 'can't take care of its poor already' (Eveli, 48, Brussels), there was general agreement that if these countries fulfil the requirements the EU sets for them, then they could, just like

Estonia, become member states. In this regard, the EU requirements were seen to coincide with the understanding of Europe.

> "I'm thinking that if we are [in the EU] then why shouldn't the other former Soviet republics be there, like Georgia or Moldova, but I don't know if they should. Then again, if they were, I wouldn't mind. […] I don't have these sorts of preferences." (Piret, 37, Tallinn).

> "Of course they could [join]. Georgia could certainly (*täielikult*) [join]. I've heard somewhere that Moldova is the poorest now and well it's small also. […] Does Moldova even want to join? I don't know." (Leeni, 73, Tallinn)

Defining the spatial boundaries of Europe through EU membership provides a good transition to the next section focusing on how Estonia is perceived within the EU. While 'Europe' is seen as more fluid category based on values, with boundaries drawn according to perceived cultural differences, and the EU occasionally conflated within this idea, then the next section addresses what the EU means for the respondents and how they perceive Estonia within this framework nearly a decade after accession.

5.4 ESTONIA IN THE EU

Whereas in the 1990s, becoming a member state of the EU was equated to restoring Estonia's natural place in the Western world, then a decade after the accession, the ideational and emotional understandings were being overshadowed by more pragmatist (capitalist/neoliberal) way of thought. This shift could have been expected with having had time to 'settle in' and position itself within the EU. However, it also provides interesting new grounds for exploring how the people in Estonia perceive their country and the Union itself.

Before going into the conceptual analysis of what European Union means for the respondents in Estonia, it is necessary to highlight that similarly to the uncritical reflection on the European values, the wider concept of the EU is not something that the respondents appeared to reflect on a day-to-day basis, and this should be kept in mind during the following discussion.

So what does the EU mean to the average Estonian? As the Eurobarometer 80 survey conducted in autumn 2013 demonstrates, the meaning of the EU for Estonians lies mostly in the possibilities to travel, study and work abroad (71%), but also in sharing a common currency, the Euro (31,4%) and in the overly complicated bureaucracy (21,1%). The next aspect mentioned in the Eurobarometer list is peace, with 17,2%. However, the relevance of peace in the EU contexts seems to gain relevance with age, as only 12,1% of 15-24 year-olds marked it as a meaningful aspect of the EU and 23,3% of 55 and older. While the statistics seems to depict a roughly similar understanding compared to the interview data, the relevance of these numbers in everyday life should, not be overstated, and how these 'meanings' are framed deserves a more careful consideration.

As to the merging of the terms, when discussing who belongs to Europe, the EU was used by the respondents as the official measure for validating a country's Europeanness, although a number of non-members were also depicted as having a good foundation for becoming a 'true' European country, as discussed in the previous section. This interpretation is rather self-evident and based on how accessing the EU was seen as the official recognition of Estonia's own 'return to Europe'. Some concern, however, could be detected over further enlargement regarding the EU's integrity. The following quote from an Estonian official in Brussels brings out quite a few interesting elements regarding how a respondent perhaps somewhat more exposed to the themes of Europe in her everyday life viewed Europe and Estonia's place in it.

> "But it's too soon to expand because we need to deal with the 2004 enlargement first. The gap between the so-called old and new has not entirely disappeared and when you listen to statements, then there is still talk about old and new or East and West. That gap needs to be overcome (*ületada*) first of all. And I think that the average European citizen is somewhat tired of the enlargement. [We] need to get the current system working now before we look any further. At the same time it's good (*õige*) that we are cooperating with the Eastern countries for economic reasons, but also in the sense of values. The European Union has a very clearly pronounced policy that we would like our neighbourhood to be… That it is easier for us to live and cooperate and do business, if we share similar values. But to share similar values, one does not certainly need to be a European Union member state. That is not the only way. Now we have the eastern partnership, southern partnership and then the strategic partners, USA and Russia. That is just another way of cooperation. In the long run,

> this enlargement theme will come up but well, now on the 1st of July [2013] Croatia joined, so let's just wait and take them in properly (*võtame nemad korralikult oma rüppe*) and get these things and decisions working more smoothly." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

There are several possible explanations for this seemingly inherent inconsistency of perceiving certain countries as part of Europe but at the same time being reluctant to validate their Europeanness through EU membership. First, the threat perception and themes of security are embedded in the value dimension and in this sense validating further post-Soviet countries' place in Europe and thereby removing them from possibly belonging to Russia's 'sphere of influence' serves the purpose of protecting Estonia's own security. Second, but also related to the theme of security, having more former Soviet countries in the European space with strong ties to the European Union is regarded as having allies with a similar historical background, who would (hopefully) share a similar perspective especially with regard to Russia and would therefore support a firmer stance against Russia (this idea of 'more Western than the West' is addressed more specifically in the next chapter). Third, and a counter-argument for a wider integration with the EU lies in the economic perspective. Even though Estonia is perceived by many respondents as superior to some other EU states in terms of economic values as discussed in the previous section, it is still a beneficiary of the EU structural funds[10]. This can be seen as justified in the suffering narrative and EU's moral obligation to support Estonia as briefly stated earlier.

One could argue here that including poorer countries in the EU might diminish the amount of support Estonia receives (which will also be discussed below in terms of responsibility Estonia is seen to have in the EU) and therefore the respondents frequently tried to negotiate these perspectives when discussing possible EU enlargement. When asked about what the EU means, the use of structural funds was one of the first things the respondents referred to. This was particularly the

[10] According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Estonia, in 2007–2013, Estonia was allocated 3.4 billion euro in structural aid. In addition to structural aid, Estonia was granted other supports and funds (cohesion policy, agricultural and fishery subsidies, rural development fund). In seven years (2007–2013), Estonia received a total of 4.764 billion euro or a little more than 500 euro per person per year in EU support. In the next period (2014-2020), Estonia receives 5.86 billion. Estonia pays around 1.4 billion euro into the EU budget. Hence, Estonia will receive 4.5 billion euros more from the EU than it pays in the following seven years. (http://www.vm.ee/en/estonia-5-years-european-union, accessed 20.05.2016)

case with older respondents in the more rural areas for whom the dimension of working and travelling abroad was not as relevant.

> "With Europe, it's that we can travel everywhere we want in Europe. We have the common currency (*raha*). The fact that we have received funds from the European Union (she laughs)." (Kaili, 70, Central Estonia).

5.4.1 THE IDEATIONAL 'SECOND ESTONIAN REPUBLIC'?

When addressing Estonia's own place specifically within the EU, several interesting elements emerged from the interview data. Moving on to the temporal, as opposed to spatial dimension of national identity construction, the period between regaining independence in 1991 and joining the EU and NATO in 2004 was at times referred to as the 'Estonian Republic' (*Eesti Vabariik*), indicating that the sense of hard-won independence has diminished with joining the EU and instead of drawing on the Estonian Republic of the interwar period as a foundation for the present-day Estonian identity construction, the basis for comparison in regards to belonging to the EU, especially in economic terms, came from what can be termed in this context the 'Second' Estonian Republic (1991-2004). This term is used here simply as an ideational temporal point of reference for Estonian identity construction surfacing from the data analysis. There appears to be a shift in how the term 'republic' (*vabariik*), which is rooted in the top-down narrative of legal continuity of the first interwar period of independence of the Estonian Republic, marking state sovereignty and independence, and from the 1990s also breaking away from the Soviet Union, is perceived by the respondents. While Estonia would certainly be viewed as a republic if asked directly, the full term (Estonian Republic [*Eesti Vabariik*]) is hardly ever used by the respondents when discussing present-day issues. The respondents would mostly talk about Estonia (Eesti) in that context. However, it *is* utilised to refer specifically to the pre-accession period (1991-2004) when discussing the EU. Addressing the hardships of the economic crisis, one respondent said: "It is very difficult [right now] in the sense that in the last years of the Estonian Republic life wasn't as hard as it is now." (Kaili, 70, Central Estonia).

The basis for this perception can be traced back to several possible factors. The anti-EU campaign in the lead-up to the EU referendum in Estonia focused heavily on the 'joining another Union' narrative. This reference to having belonged to the Soviet Union, a significant negative 'Other' firmly rooted in the foundation of Estonian national identity-building since the beginning of the 1990s, laid out a wider negative context not only in terms of distribution of power, which will be discussed below, but also emotionally. This narrative of going from one union to another, which was prevalent among the Eurosceptic camp in the pre-accession period, had become relevant again, especially in light of the economic and the related 'value' crisis discussed in the previous sections.

> "We were in one union and [it looks like] it's turning into the same union in the end, because here in Europe, they want to turn everything into one and the same. In the end it'll turn out to be just like that [the Soviet Union]. Within time [that is]. […] They are just centralising and centralising and in the end we'll have the Soviet Union back." (Priit, 49, Tallinn).

> "It's like the Soviet Union used to be. That there were 15 republics. Now it's all the same. […] I mean, let me tell you how we were taught in school when still in the Soviet Union. Our music teacher taught us that when you have 15 republics – that one branch breaks easily, but when you have 15 of them, you can't break them quite so easily. That we should be in a union, but well the union's just changed now. Let's just say there isn't much of a difference." (Toomas, 39, Tallinn).

Attached to this wider narrative is the perceived decrease of Estonia's independence and decision-making powers after joining the EU structures accompanied by the general disillusionment with the EU in light of the economic crisis, which helps to consolidate this understanding further.

> "Since I was not around myself […] then I think that the fear of losing our independence [she meant not regaining independence] was even bigger [late 80s and early 90s]. […] Now in one respect […], losing independence has more to do with the fact that we are in the European Union. That perhaps now it's this large union and country." (Siret, 22, Southern Estonia).

> "And people think that in a way we don't have our proper state any longer, our own decision-making and our own backyard. [We do] but everything is coming from Brussels and our word doesn't count for anything anymore, or well it does, but it's all down to the officials [we have there]." (Mart, 50, Brussels).

Even though quite a few respondents were critical of the EU structures, the level of dissatisfaction can be seen more as coming from within the general framework of belonging to the EU rather than longing to exist independently of it. Belonging to the EU with all of its imperfections is still considered the lesser evil compared to being outside it.

> "The fact that a lot of youngsters say that 'oh we're just hanging on (*sabarakk*) to Brussels and we do everything Brussels wants us to', but our little Estonia, we alone, life has shown it, can't exist. We don't have the strength, can't manage on our own." (Leeni, 73, Tallinn).

As can be seen from the quotes above, the people in their late 30s, 40s and 50s used the late Soviet period as a benchmark (and grumbling about constraints on sovereignty), while those in their early 20s have no direct memory of the USSR. Older people who can remember the Stalinist and immediate post-Stalinist period appeared to be more hesitant to draw a direct comparison between the EU and USSR, or, as seen from the last quote, seemed to be more inclined to think there is no other option but to be part of the EU.

An important element in Estonia's general identity-building narrative emerges from here. The idea of Estonia as a small but sturdy state is accompanied by the narrative of suffering and unfairness, which will be discussed more in Chapter 7 discussing everyday life. This line of thought is also evident in how the respondents discussed themes of equality and EU's regulations and norms that have been imposed on Estonia during the last decade.

The decision-making powers, or rather the lack of these was discussed in terms of formal equality in rights of member states. The relative equality of member states within the EU has been highlighted in the Estonian top-down discourse, but the substance of equality was questioned among most of the respondents who remained sceptical about the ability of Estonia to influence European Union policy centrally.

> "It's always like that, that on paper we can be all equal, but there is a difference in the equality." (Priit, 49, Tallinn).

> "I do [see Estonia as an equal partner in the EU]. I think that it'll rise even higher and become more equal than it is now. There is always someone

> more equal than the others. I think that we will go far. People want to and will is such a big thing." (Anna, 65, Tallinn).

Even though in the last quote she reiterates the formal clause of equality between member states, the rest of the quote goes on to discuss the opposite to that. The lack of equality is seen as translating into Estonia's interests not being represented and, consequently, the complexities of the state not being accounted for when EU policies and regulations are devised. The EU is seen as enforcing broad-brush policies without regard for the regional, cultural or most importantly, the economic differences between EU member states. The perceived unfairness and disregard for Estonia's smallness and economic development by the EU becomes especially prevalent and from this perspective there is the sense that the European Union is seen at times as more of a hindrance than a benefit to it.

> "We would fit there if only the regulations and all that politics would be different. One can't take a small country and nation like us as an equal partner with the other big ones. It's just not conceivable. […] The demands from us should be smaller or equivalent to the size and capabilities." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

> "It's all these goals that the European Union sets for us – that we all have to go [along] with the European Union. But they have no regard for our own country and how small we are, and what suits us better. […] Like their demands are so high for our small Estonia. I think that they are too high. That they want everybody to be more like Europe but at the same time not [everybody is]. Well the salaries – they aren't. Look at the salaries in Europe, but we don't have those. But at the same time they want to set all the taxes and all those things according to Europe. That is wrong." (Linda 34, Tallinn).

Another important element emerges from the last quote. Here, she is referring to economically more advanced European states with the term 'Europe', which demonstrates the complex approach to this and how, in the mind of this respondent, in practical economic terms Estonia has yet to fulfil the imagined self-set criteria for becoming European. In this sense, the term 'Europe' still has an economically aspirational aspect to it.

The EU's regulations and quotas set for Estonia were especially highlighted by people in rural areas, where local agricultural producing and livestock farming has become more difficult. The respondents blamed EU regulations for the disappearance of the informal market and smaller businesses, which were

considered essential elements of Estonian rural life. In this sense, the EU is framed as a 'threat' to the traditional way of life. Yet, at the same time, the benefits from being in the EU are seen to outweigh this threat.

> "We are very bounded and still very attached to the European Union. That perhaps there are things that Estonians would like to do but simply cannot [because we are in the EU]. […] I was thinking in the lines of agriculture. […] At one point people just stopped keeping cows. And because a lot of people had the problem that they could no longer give the milk anywhere, unless they started to do that officially. Those small households just disappeared." (Siret, 22, Southern Estonia).

> "In the [cafeteria] kitchen we need to measure the temperature of the refrigerators on a daily basis. That is actually rubbish. […] I would say unreasonable use of working hours (*tööaeg*). […] It was also in the papers that some of our laws are written in too much detail, that some of them could just be plain reasonable (*üldinimlikult mõistetavad*)." (Laila, 55, Setomaa).

The slow working processes and excessive bureaucracy of the EU were opposed to the understanding of Estonia's flexibility and ability to achieve more rapid reforms. This was explicitly discussed by one Estonian EU official.

> "Well as an authentic Estonian – we like these relatively, let's say quick and concrete decisions and not these endless discussions, but here [in Brussels] they have a lot of this endless discussion. […] It can happen that things don't get decided because some countries' opposition is so strong and we can discuss an issue for 5 or 7 years and not get anywhere. I don't think that this is very encouraging. […] Looking at it through the media […] then European Union is seen as establishing new additional annoying standards. But well the average person has no idea how they get to these specific standards. […] That yes, the European Union is perhaps this annoying establisher of control and rules. […] We fulfil all the European Union laws and directives on the dot (*punktipealt*). The others don't do that." (Riina, 32, Brussels).

There was a level of dissatisfaction detectable with not only the regulations, norms and requirements set by the EU, but with how Estonia has been fulfilling these.

> "I mean, I thought that Estonians are a conscientious people. And all these directives were taken too literally (*üks ühele*). Even the great politicians have said that you go to Brussels and there aren't these types of fastidiousness or demands that have been placed on us, and this has killed off these lovely small places like cafeterias or something." (Signe, 70, Muhu island).

On the one hand, this 'poster-boy' image is used to highlight the 'true' European values as discussed in the previous section and perceived as something to take pride in. On the other hand, a level of disgruntlement is evident when discussing some of the 'unreasonable' requirements set by the EU, which Estonia's government fulfils to the letter in part to maintain this image and demonstrate its deep-rooted belonging to the EU structures and European values. It can be argued that sustaining the normal 'good European' state image is a matter of ontological security for Estonia. Pēteris Timofejevs Henriksson uses this concept to describe the Latvian quest for 'Europeanness' explaining that it is useful for suggesting that states might 'feel' the need to follow a coherent state narrative in their actions for not only the domestic and external audiences but also to sustain a consistent Self and ensure the credibility and predictability of their respective countries (2017: 222). This applies similarly in the case of Estonia.

However, there appears to be a difference in perspective with people on the ground, who are more focused on everyday issues and tangible material benefits. Maintaining this image may have an adverse effect locally, where EU regulations were seen by the respondents as detached from the everyday practicalities and therefore distanced themselves from not only the already distant EU decision-making processes but also from the state-level politics. While fulfilling all the targets set by the EU in the pre-accession period was seen as a necessity by the respondents, the unconditional implementation of EU norms and directives has come under criticism having gained a decade of experience in the union.

> Piret: "But I don't know why they [the Estonian political elite] wanted to go there [into the EU] so badly. Perhaps we could have gained a bit in prosperity for a year or two and then join. That we were in such a hurry to get there, but well maybe it was a correct [decision], because the faster we got in, the faster we got our road constructions and all sorts of projects going."
>
> Me: "Who do you mean by 'them'?
>
> Piret: "Well Estonian state, the government […]. They organized it all – that the GDP and everything would be in order. And that we're not going to raise that tax, we'll raise this, or that or the third one, so that for god's sake everything would be within the norm." (37, Tallinn).

The EU was seen as sharing responsibility in case of any financial problems, but interestingly Estonia was not perceived as contributing to this shared

responsibility (as also seen in the section discussing the North-South division in Europe), which demonstrates how the respondents relate to the role of Estonia within the EU and the EU itself. While the assistance received from the EU was seen as a positive aspect of joining, this almost appears to be deserved for having suffered through the Soviet occupation and fulfilling the accession criteria. The respondents appeared to shift the responsibility for the functioning of the EU to larger and wealthier member states.

> "Well let's just say that I didn't get much out of it when we joined the [EU] and if we break from them. Well let's say about the common money, about the Estonian kroon – when something had gone really wrong, then there would be nobody to palm them off to. In that sense, Euro is the Euro. Before Estonia had to keep the kroon on a certain level. Now, let's just say, it is no longer Estonia's problem." (Toomas, 39, Tallinn).

One might question here that perhaps the equality discussed earlier is not sought for as this would also increase Estonia's responsibility within the EU? A possible explanation could be that having so-called ticked all the boxes and 'suffered' through the 90s to reach the admission into the EU, there was an expectation of some leniency in terms of filling all the norms and regulations discussed above.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, almost a decade within the EU, the security dimension of belonging to the EU had lost some of its relevance and economic themes had started to prevail. This can be explained with the recent economic crisis and relatively stable security situation within the area for some time. Since then, and with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in Donbass area, there has been a shift in this perspective, but at the time of conducting the interviews, I would argue that the expected European 'normality' had settled in to a degree. The sense of firmly belonging to the value structures, and even surpassing the dwindling regard for 'true' values of Europe by Southern European countries, had become evident. The chapter demonstrates that there has been a shift from the Othering of anything Soviet/Russian to a more nuanced positioning of Estonia as North in the spatial perceptions of Europe.

Apart from opposing the North and South in ideational 'Europe' for the respondents, this construction of spatial 'normality' can have further, likely unintended consequences. Shaping the perception of 'Europe' according to understandings of 'true' European values embodied by Estonia might cause further divisions in the mental mapping of 'Europe'. Perhaps some disillusionment with the idea of 'Europe' can also be seen as a possible factor for the rise of support for the anti-EU national conservative party in Estonia in recent years.

The chapter also demonstrates how a new temporal benchmark for Estonian identity-construction can be seen to lie in the beginning of 1990s rather than the inter-war period. This can be attributed both to generational change, but also to inherently perceiving Estonia as a sovereign state, even if constrained at times by EU regulations, without the need to rely back on the narrative of state restoration - in a way having 'returned to Europe' - achieved 'normality'.

CHAPTER 6. RUSSIA AS THE OTHER

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, what lies at the very heart of identifying oneself either individually, as a family, a community or a state, is the need for the Other. In the present thesis, Estonia's national identity is seen as constructed through the reflexion of several Others (Europe, Russia) in a complex and at times contradictory manner. Focusing on Russia as the perennial Other in Estonia's national identity construction, this chapter brings out the complex perceptions of Russia that existed in the aftermath of the economic crisis, in order to facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the Estonian identity-building process. Since the 'abnormality' of the Soviet Union Estonian identity is set against (see Chapter 2) also refers to post-Soviet Russia, which refuses to accept the foundational narrative of Estonian statehood and is seen as neo-imperialist and a security threat, it is essential to explore this relationship of Othering in order to gain deeper insights into post-accession Estonian 'normality'. Not surprisingly, the academic literature has to date mostly focused on the threatening qualities of Russia as the Other in understanding Estonian national identity. However, while issues of security did not lose their relevance in Estonia's relations with its Eastern neighbour (i.e. 'normalisation' of relations has not occurred within the decade following the accession to the EU and NATO), certain new non-securitised aspects emerged which need to be addressed in order to understand the post-accession 'normality' in Estonia. The first part of this chapter focuses on the securitised nature and threatening qualities of Estonian-Russian relations while the second part looks at the non-threatening qualities within Othering Russia in Estonian identity-building process.

In the first section of this chapter I will explore the idea of 'normalising' relations with Russia, the role of conflicting historical narratives and cultural Othering within the relations with Russia and in constructing Estonian national identity vis-à-vis Russia as discussed previously in Chapter 3. The second part of the chapter brings out an interesting more recent development emerging from the interview data, which frames the more pragmatic approach in strengthening economic ties with Russia within the wider national identity construction. More specifically, the interviews revealed that relations with Russia were conceived in terms of the neoliberal economic narrative that had taken hold during the EU accession period and which is used to position Estonia within the framework of the enlarged EU (as previously discussed in Chapter 5). On the basis of the interview data, I argue that, with Estonia having spent almost a decade in the EU and NATO in a security situation characterised by relative calm, a certain normalisation – different to that which had been articulated as a goal in the 1990s - had been achieved in relation to Russia and that pragmatic economic themes had become more relevant in people's everyday perceptions.

6.2 SECURITISING RUSSIA

6.2.1 NORMALISING RELATIONS

At the centre of the Estonian national campaign since the late 1980s has been the assumption that Estonia forms part of the West, as opposed to the 'crisis' zone of the East. The notion of securing a 'return to Europe' – and, more broadly, a 'return to the Western World' (Smith 2003a: 156) has been one of the dominating features of the national narrative in Estonia (as previously demonstrated in length in Chapter 5). Addressing the core of Estonia's foreign policy within this national narrative, integration to the West was depicted as a necessary prelude to the full 'normalisation' of relations with Russia (Smith 2003c: 66) but, what did this mean?

As mentioned in the literature review, Jüri Luik, Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs (1994-1995), in his speech 'Quo Vadis Estonian Foreign Policy?' in 1994 put forward an equation of Security equals Integration plus Normalisation. President

Lennart Meri in 1995 added to that that: 'Normalisation for us means establishing the same kinds of relations with Russia as we enjoy with the United States or Germany or Sweden'. It has been rightly claimed that among the reasons for such a construction was the hope that membership in Western organisations would reconstruct the relationship between Estonia and its Eastern neighbour, forcing Russia to abandon its post-imperial manners and treat Estonia as a 'normal' country, not a part of its 'sphere of influence' (Berg and Ehin 2009: 3). However, if one looks more closely at this construction, it can be argued that there might in fact have been less 'real' expectation that the relationship with Russia would be fully reconstructed and become 'normalised' through the integration with the Western structures than meets the eye in the first place.

The standstill in Estonian-Russian relations post-2004 can be attributed to conflicting identities, where in this case, Estonia is constructed as a 'normal' Western state, ready and willing to engage with Russia on the level of European postmodernist values while Russia, as an imperialistic, backward and more traditional country in its security logic, proves itself impossible to have 'normal' relations with. This is not to say that improvement in relations with Russia was not genuinely expected or that a change in relations did not take place. But what would happen if the relations did indeed 'normalise'? Since Estonian Europeanness can be seen to be contingent to a degree on the 'Othering' of Russia, 'normal' relations with Russia would remove one of the core features of Estonia's current claim to Europeanness. That being said, if relations were to 'normalise' (which is, at the time of writing, a task much further away than it was in 2013), it would also remove the very need for Estonia to assert its Europeanness since the underlying need for security through belonging to European and Euro-Atlantic institutions would disappear. Plus, as can be seen in other regards, after nearly a decade since accession to the EU and NATO, there appears to be enough self-esteem and confidence in its acceptance as a 'European' country that people perceive Estonia to be an even 'truer' Europe in terms of economic values as demonstrated in the previous chapter (Chapter 5). This dynamic of normalising Estonian-Russian relation is certainly complex, and as can be seen from international events in recent years, perhaps full normalisation is a futile hypothetical to pose, but exploring this complicated idea of normalisation gives

us an understanding of the wider identity-constructions in Estonia as to what 'normality' entails in relation to Russia.

Indeed, there are several complex layers in the idea of 'normalising' relations which come out in my analysis of interviews and deserve to be addressed in order to better understand the wider connotations of this approach. The interview data revealed that the underlying securitisation of relations with Russia is still evident. It is difficult to disentangle the various themes running through the interview data regarding continuous securitisation of Russia as these are conflated at times. Nevertheless, I will first provide an overview of the role that conflicting historical narratives play within present-day national identity constructions. This is followed by the discussion of Russia as the Other from the perspective of Estonia within the international structures of EU and NATO, inclusion into which was supposed to 'normalise' relations with Russia as put forward by the official discourse in the 1990s. Finally, I look at what had indeed become 'normal' in understanding relations with Russia after nearly a decade within these organisations.

6.2.2 CONFLICTING HISTORY NARRATIVES

One of the underlying elements to include in order to analyse how the process of Othering Russia impacts Estonian national identity constructions is the role of the conflicting history narratives within the domestic and international context. As previously discussed in the literature review (Chapter 3), the conflicting history narratives have been explored at length by various scholars, especially in the aftermath of the relocation of the Bronze Soldier monument in 2007. The essence for this conflict lies in the fact that Russia maintains the stance that the Soviet takeover of Estonia did not amount to an illegal occupation, which is the basis of the dominant EU discourse. The previous chapter demonstrated that the interwar period has lost some its relevance in how people on the ground negotiate belonging to Europe and that the 1990s have gained traction as a benchmark for this identity construction. However, when it comes to relations with Russia, the interwar period and the ensuing Soviet occupation still form a significant element in shaping people's perceptions. The independence Estonia had prior to the

occupation and the politics of the Soviet era, create an *us* versus *them* dichotomy in Estonia's identity construction (see Onken 2007). The following statements by interviewees illustrate this very well:

> "Even though I think that Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania do not pose any sort of a political or military threat to Russia, then the Russian minority topic and of course the Second World War are completely different for Estonia and these approaches are so different that to find some sort of mutual understanding here – that takes time. New generations need to come. As long as the people who remember it all from both sides, who fought on a specific front, are alive… From the Russian side the ones who fought in the Great Patriotic War and from the Estonian side the ones who were forced to fight on the Russian front or the Forest Brothers, or the ones who were deported before or after the War. This anger and this difference in world view is so great that I don't know whether it's even possible to overcome in this artificial manner. Perhaps it's time that will solve this issue." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

The understanding that 'normalisation' of relations is a matter of time ('new generations need to come') suggests that for this respondent, there is no fundamental difference that couldn't be overcome in the relations. This perception is supported to a degree by the new temporal benchmark for Estonian 'normality' shifting to the 1990s rather than the interwar period of independence as already discussed in Chapter 5. Another respondent, a slightly older and from a mixed Estonian-Russian background, indicated rather that the resolution to this issue is for Russia to finally come to terms with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and accept Estonia as an independent country.

> "We have the Soviet time behind us (*selja taga*). And as long as nobody talks it through on either side, this attitude will remain sharp (*teravaks*). Their government, their Putin - he said that the biggest mistake has been allowing the Soviet Union to disintegrate. […] We are an independent country. And they will inevitably have to accept us like that. Whether they want to or not. Well, I understand that they don't want to, but there's nothing they can do about that." (Anna, 65, Tallinn).

As can be seen from the excerpts above, and again in line with previous research, the interview data provided supporting evidence for the understanding that Russia's expansionist interests had not disappeared with Estonia joining the EU and NATO. Russia's nostalgia for the Soviet Union becomes evident in the Estonian political discourse and the notion that Russia still sees Estonia in its sphere of influence constantly reconstructs the securitised nature of Estonian-Russian

relations. How the respondent below discussed the events surrounding the Bronze Soldier incident ('it has not gone anywhere') demonstrates her clear perception that the relations have failed to 'normalise'.

> "We have been conquered and we have been treated badly. Very badly indeed, take the Siberia topic – the Estonian will never forgive that. […] Even if I myself or my grandparents weren't taken to Siberia, then I'm still mad about all of this. And it's because the Russians themselves haven't changed their attitude. As they were shouting during the Bronze Night - we're back! This all demonstrated that it has not gone anywhere. From both sides. […] It hasn't buried these thoughts for sure. This can be seen here and there, where they use their people… Like Georgia or Belarus or anywhere. It can be seen that it hasn't buried their thoughts that we would all belong there." (Katrin, 32, Tallinn).

The conflicting historical narratives constitute one of the main sources of Russia's drift in the anti-Western direction (Fofanova and Morozov 2009: 26). And understandably this creates tension in Estonian-Russian relations as well as Russia's relations with the West. The battle of historical narratives is also embedded in the assertion of Europeanness. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 3) both Estonia and Russia seek to assert their own Europeanness while denying the Europeanness of the other (Mälksoo 2009: 69). In this sense there is a clash of identities at both the domestic and international level as both constructs deny the legitimacy of the other (Kasekamp and Brüggemann 2009: 51) casting one another concurrently into the category of 'unclean' or 'false' Europe (Mälksoo 2009: 69; Morozov 2003, 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that Estonia would not need to assert its own Europeanness quite as much if the relations were to indeed 'normalise'. As stated before, there are two sides to this 'what if' scenario which is today much further away than in 2013 – if relations were to 'normalise' as put forward in the 1990s, Estonia would indeed lose the Russian Other for asserting its Europeanness, but on the other hand, there would be less need to assert Europeanness if Russia did not constantly try to undermine this by asserting that Estonia belongs to its sphere of influence.

6.2.3 POST-ACCESSION 'NORMALITY'

Looking at the 'normalisation' construct from another perspective, the idea of 'normalising' relations with Russia during the 1990s can be seen as bound up with the strategic goal of joining the EU and NATO. Desecuritising Russia on the condition of joining the EU and NATO can be viewed as incentivising the international community to include Estonia into its structures in order to stabilise the international political landscape and remove Estonia from possibly being considered by Russia to be under its sphere of influence. At the same time Estonia was able to demonstrate its rightful belonging to the Western value system by emphasising its readiness to develop 'normal' relations with Russia. As Estonian Foreign Minister Toomas Hendrik Ilves stated in 1996, the normalisation of relations with Russia will be difficult to achieve as long as Estonia is unable to relate to Russia as 'a normal Western state, free and confident of its independence and not as a former colony or oblast' burdened by complexes and doubts (cited in Smith 2003c: 64). In the domestic context, this discourse helped demonstrate the necessity of belonging to the Western structures, with Russia viewed as an existential threat conditioned on the accession.

Estonia's official integration to the West was validated in 2004 with the accession to the EU and NATO. However, Estonian-Russian relations did not reach the level of normalisation argued for. On the contrary, there are voices arguing that since Estonia joined these Western institutions, its relations with Russia have even taken a yet more controversial turn (Mälksoo 2006: 279; Berg and Ehin 2009: 29). Prior to the accession to these organisations emphasising images of threat emanating from Russia was not advantageous for the prospect of joining the EU and NATO, due to their cautious attitude vis-à-vis Moscow (Noreen and Sjöstedt 2004: 741). However, once EU and NATO membership had been achieved, Estonia and other new member states felt a lot more secure in expressing their 'true' position.

While the idea of 'normalisation' introduced in the 1990s remains elusive a decade after joining the EU and NATO, the discursive construction of 'normalisation' has in itself been influential in the Estonian national identity-building process. Since the idea of 'normalisation' has played an important part in Estonian identity-construction especially towards Russia, the process of striving for 'normalisation'

can be seen as contributing to establishing an alternative 'normality' in relations with Russia. 'Normalisation' of relations or rather the lack of 'normal' relations with Russia is referred to here in the more general idea that the portrayal of Russia as a perennial 'Other' as an imperialistic, backward and a more traditional country in its security logic, fails to meet the standards of 'normalisation' put forward by the Estonian political elite in the pre-accession period (as seen through the quotes of President Meri and Foreign Minister Luik, and also of my respondents as discussed above). That the perceived differences in worldview and values, the chaotic, arbitrary and lawless behaviour of Russia, do not coincide with the Estonian idea of 'normality'. Europe and Estonia within it constitute the 'normality' for Estonia and 'normal' relations would thus be possible if Russia would embrace the same values and accept that Estonia can no longer be seen as belonging its sphere of influence.

> "I don't know what made [the relations] bad to begin with. Is it really only the fact that we became independent or has the fact that we joined the European Union and NATO caused the resentment on the Russian side? I couldn't tell. I think that they perhaps also don't like that we joined another union. […] I think that [relations] with other countries are very much okay. I think that the only ones who have any problems are the Eastern neighbours. As to the others, the countries surrounding us and the ones further away – I think that the relations are very good." (Piret, 37, Tallinn).

The constant process of trying to achieve 'normal' relations can therefore be regarded as a 'normality' in itself already. The process of 'normalising' relations has become a wider part of Estonian identity constructions and hence guiding foreign policy decisions more broadly rather than simply a separate policy goal as seen in the 1990s. However, again, one needs to keep in mind the pre-2014 context here.

My interviews showed that this top-down discourse of 'normalising' relations had also left an imprint on how the respondents discussed relations with Russia. The understanding that joining the EU and NATO would alter the relationship with Russia and provide security came forward during the interviews especially with Estonian-speaking respondents.

> "My fears have not disappeared and I've also noticed that our state fathers (*riigiisadel*) have not lost that fear. Really. Although I have to say that I

> was really looking forward to the European Union (*euroliitu*)." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

> "I would like to keep living in an independent country (she laughs). […] Let's hope that our political leaders are smart enough not to create some pointless (*kanakitkumise*) argument or any kind of a sharp situation. Yes, we are small, we are tiny. I have thought about this a lot that we are so small that if Russia wanted, it could do whatever it wanted with us (she laughs). And very quickly, even if we are [a member of the European Union and NATO]." (Merike, 49, Muhu island).

However, as seen from the quotes above, this expectation of 'normalising' relations had not materialised with joining the international structures, and the threat perception regarding Russia was still evident in 2013. Another expected thread running through the interview data is the depiction of Estonia as a small state. Mindaugas Jurkynas (2014: 114-115) claims that the size and lack of resources (see discussion in section 6.3) of Estonia (and the other Baltic states) sharpen the security anxieties and prompt the Baltic States to remind the EU and NATO of these concerns. On the other hand, he also brings out how joining these international structures was part of alleviating the effects of smallness, and through a variety of regional cooperation (especially with the Nordic countries) the relevance of 'smallness' as a security factor has diminished (Jurkynas 2014: 118-123). Even so, the threat perceptions of Russia still came through most of the Estonian-speakers' interviews.

> "Of course it would be nice to live without fear, but they, Russia can often conduct itself in a pretty beastly (*tõpralik*) manner with its threats, demands, without giving up, fighting without (finding) any agreements." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

When discussing the topic of whether the EU and NATO have played a part in Estonia's relations with Russia, a respondent from Tallinn brought out relevance of joining the international structures very clearly, but also noted that the security matters related to Russia had not vanished with the accession.

> "Yes, of course they play [a part]. European Union was perhaps a sort of a victory for Estonians in front of Russians – 'see now we're in the West, don't you… Now you need to look at us from the same level, not top-down'. And well NATO, I think Estonians considered NATO to be even more important than the European Union. For the sake of security. Russia is still perceived to be this sort of a threat from the East." (Tarmo, 27, Tallinn).

As one might expect, however, a different perception of threat emanating from Russia surfaced from the Russian-speakers' interviews.

> "I do not see any danger from Russia. Because there is no point just to be afraid of Russia. It's just overblown. This is already coming from the military, from these [military] exercises. And they are already starting to blow up some problems from this. There, near the border between Latvia and Lithuania, Russia and Belarus had their exercises, near the border of the European Union. Well, what's wrong with that - the Baltic countries had their exercises in Estonia. There is nothing wrong with that. This is all blown up from nothing, just like that. If there would have been problems, they would have surfaced a long time ago. But, at the moment there are no problems. Especially now that the border treaty is signed, almost signed." (Aleksey, 52, Tallinn).

Another Russian-speaking respondent in Narva reiterated a similar point although she appeared to choose her words very carefully in how she communicated her stance on the matter to me.

> "Well, Estonia now feels support, I think, the European Union and, as it were, is not afraid (she laughs) of Russia. But Russia, how to say, I think that ... but ... (thinks for a long time), Russia has a lot of its own problems, to be still engaged in some sort of such problems with Estonia. For Estonia, I think Russia, well, I do not know, I do not even know how to say - Russia is not an enemy, but it's hard to say." (Nina, 20, Narva).

The failure to fully 'normalise' relations as put forward in the 90s, does not however suggest, that joining the EU and NATO had little effect in Estonia's self-positioning towards Russia. The existential threat Russia posed had diminished ('fears have not disappeared') and there had been a general shift in the framework of how Russia is discussed in everyday politics. In demonstrating Estonia's intentions for normalising relations with Russia to the Western structures, the failure for this normalisation was placed on Russia, therefore denying its place in the Western world while simultaneously reaffirming Estonia's rightful belonging to these value structures, which is seen to constitute Estonia's 'normality'. Estonia positioned its foreign policy firmly within the Western structures regarding any contentious issues with Russia, and has taken the stance of 'more Western than the West' in terms of understanding Russia's true intentions, which has become part of the identity-construction within the EU and NATO, and a certain degree of securitisation belongs within this dimension. The difference in the quotes from Estonian- and Russian-speakers demonstrated that the Russian-speaking

respondents suggested that for them there was a lack of understanding of Russia within the Estonian elite.

An example of a top-down construction of simultaneously placing Estonia within the Western value structures while denying Russia's place within it can be seen in a statement by President Ilves during the Georgian War in 2008:

> "In a situation where they [Russia] want to demolish the democratic order and European values, it is a priority that the European Union and NATO preserved its solidarity and support to other democratic countries." (President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Eesti Päevaleht, 26.08.2008).

This thesis is in no way trying to claim that these concerns are not valid, especially given the events in 2008 that triggered this statement. The aim here is not to remove meaning from the speech acts but to analyse these acts in a wider context, in order to provide a more in-depth understanding.

6.2.4 SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The interviews with Estonian-speaking respondents suggest that the Russian-speaking populations within the former Soviet republics were viewed as a tool for Russian expansionist interests and exerting its influence in these states. These concerns were expressed in a two-fold manner – Russia's interference in Estonia's domestic affairs and the external image mostly referring to the Western world that this creates as well. The respondents sensed that this perception of Russia's influence over Estonia was also relevant outside Estonia. As discussed in Chapter 2, while self-esteem is driven from within it is also contingent on how Others view Estonia and any Russian influence over Estonia does not fit how the respondents wanted Estonia to be seen from the outside. This is an image that Estonia has tried to rid itself of as it relates both to security and cultural realms of its identity-construction discussed in this chapter.

> "Inevitably we are seen as, oh Russia, that Estonia – oh that's Russia. I'm sure that this way of thought exists (*või seostub, et*) that we are like Russia's pendant." (Greta, 52, Tallinn).

The interethnic relations in Estonia will be discussed in more length in the next chapter focusing on everyday perspectives, and this section will focus more on the external elements of national identity construction although also related to the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia. The events surrounding the relocation of the Bronze Soldier were perceived to depict Russia's constant readiness to assert its influence over Estonia. As discussed in the literature review, Russia has still not accepted that Estonia does not belong to its sphere of influence.

In a sense, the Russian-speaking population in Estonia was viewed as under the influence of the Russian state. However, a more complex dynamic of the ethnic relations will be addressed in the next chapter and the selected quotes here should be viewed in connection to other complementary understandings of relations with Russia (e.g. economic). But within the theme of security, a relatively explicit and perhaps expected approach could be seen in the responses. Russia's exploitation of the Russian-speaking populations in Estonia for the purposes of its expansionist foreign policy came through in the respondents' discussions regarding the removal of the Bronze Soldier in 2007.

> "I think that, well, removing the Bronze Soldier was one reason, but it certainly wasn't the main reason. This process, the riot against removing the Bronze Soldier, today we know that this was planned long ahead. The rioters were so-called recruited. They were brainwashed and funded. This is another example of Russia's foreign policy and how it still doesn't want to let go of Estonia or probably also Latvia and Lithuania. That it still has this thorn in its side (*okas hinges*)." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

> "But I think that the support came from outside, the compatriots support programme." (Greta, 52, Tallinn).

The same events surrounding the relocation of the Bronze Soldier provided a good ground for how the Estonian-speaking respondents perceived Russia's constant readiness to assert its influence over Estonia. Russia's means for 'subjecting' its neighbours to its control (see quote below) were seen as anything from the direct use of force (references to Georgia) or more covert (references to the compatriot programme, economic influence over Armenia). Russia's foreign policy conducted through means of 'twisting something out' and 'creating a mess' places Russia firmly outside the 'European' value dimension discussed in the previous chapter

and makes any 'normalisation' of relations unfeasible unless there's a significant change in its approach.

For instance, when asked about what she meant by 'explosive' relations between Estonia and Russia and physical danger to the country, one respondent said:

> "Absolutely, the same Bronze Night shows that Russia is very well aware of its actions. As they went into Georgia, how they rolled over it (*üle käima*) and murdered people. This can actually happen in Estonia as well. […] The reasons didn't lie in the Bronze Soldier or the fact that it was relocated, but again [this had to do with] demonstrating where the Estonians stand (*koha kätte näitamine*). That you [can't touch] our Bronze Soldier! It was a good opportunity to create this mess (*tohuvabohu*) here. Because why else were the people provoked and agitated to go out. Well, perhaps the Russians wouldn't have gone to rebel on the streets had they not been given an order. I think this was very well organised by Russia again." (Katrin, 32, Tallinn).

Again, the understanding that people were 'provoked and agitated' to go out and 'ordered' to 'rebel on the streets' was seen as a reason for the riots rather than any interethnic internal tension.

Russia's imperial interests regarding the former Soviet Union area were still very much part of how Russia's intentions were interpreted by the Estonian-speaking respondents. In addition to references to Georgia in the previous quote, the respondents brought up examples of Russia's desire to hold on to or increase its influence in the region.

> "How I see it is that all large countries would like to be even bigger. All neighbours should be subject to (*alluma*) them whether directly or so that they are a separate country but (*käpp peab peal olema*) it has control over it. This is a problem with large countries and we are here next to a large country and always will be (*elu lõpuni*). If we want to have different politics from them, then they'll always find something. For example that there are a lot of Russian people here and something can be twisted (*kruttima*) out of that. It's always like that. Not exactly the same thing [happening] next to Russia – I have some Armenian acquaintances and they tell me that Armenia is totally under Russian control (*käpa all*). As soon as some [problems] arise, they turn off the electricity (*kraanid*) and that's it. It's just how it is. If we want to live well, then we will have to bow towards them until we die, as they say. A large country (*suurriik*) is a large country." (Priit, 49, Tallinn).

However, again, a clear differentiation was made between the state and Russian people when discussing this topic. In addition, the respondents attributed the failure to normalise relations with Russia to the political elite dominating in Russia. The Yeltsin era was seen as building a path towards normalising relations, while Vladimir Putin coming to power was seen to have derailed this process of 'normalisation' and seen as contributing to the opposite.

> "I think that the relations have gotten somewhat worse than they were at the beginning of Estonian Republic simply because the president is somewhat different there compared to Yeltsin, but I can't comment any further than that." (Raul, 22, Tallinn).

As can be seen again in the quote above, a comparison is made with the beginning of 1990s, and the 'Estonian Republic' as discussed in Chapter 5 has become a point of reference for this younger respondent within the theme of relations with Russia as well. This is a potentially significant finding which builds further on the argument made in the last chapter on how the 1990s, which was supposed to be a transitional phase leading to a 'normal' future, has become a reference point for 'normality' in its own right.

Nevertheless, and again in line with the wider idea of demonstrating willingness to establish 'normal' relations with Russia, but at the same time not ceding national self-esteem, there were voices arguing for improved relations with Russia. Again the 'abnormality' of Russia is placed on the elite, and not on the state as a whole. This line of thought appears to contrast the official discourse, which posits neo-imperialism as a basis for this 'abnormality'. One could argue here that perhaps the perception of 1990s Russia with Yeltsin as the president has altered as well in today's changed context.

> "It seems like they are getting better. I think that they should be better now that Ansip is going over to visit Russia. Seems like things are getting better – that people can overcome this. I think that the relations with Russia are what they are because of their [current] elite there, because at some point when Yeltsin was in charge (*pukis*) and so, then things were completely normal. I think that right now this has more to do with Putin, who won't or doesn't want [to have normal relations]. I can't imagine where this defiance comes from – why they don't want to let go of Estonia or get along somehow, even though you should get along with your neighbours." (Piret, 37, Tallinn).

To provide a broader understanding of how the respondents discussed relations with Russia, an example is provided in the textbox below from an interview with a woman in Tallinn who brought forward several points analysed above and some which will be addressed in the following section. The negotiation between several themes (normalisation of relations, 'more Western than the West' aspect, Russia as incomprehensible (Orientalising), the negotiation between security and lack of voice in the EU) that came through in the interviews regarding Russia and how they intertwine can be seen in more detail here.

Figure 13. Cartoon. Source: Postimees 11/05/2007

Excerpts from an interview with Greta, a 52-year-old Estonian-speaking woman held in Tallinn. She was working as a mid-level manager in retail and had a higher education degree. We held the interview in her workplace in a private office. She was very open, talkative and seemed comfortable in expressing her opinions during the interview.

"I'd very much like it to be, but well it should be like that in the bigger picture, but I don't know, I do hope that they can do it in a little bit more subtle manner. Diplomacy, diplomacy, diplomacy and all these sorts of things. But well, what man to man (referring to the cartoon)? We don't say anything any longer, it's the European Union who says. Estonia is a nobody (*tühi koht*) for Russia. A complete nobody. It's rather the European Union, and what stance the European Union takes. What the European Union allows to be done to us and what not, right? But well, undoubtedly, if you ask whether the European Union or not European Union, then definitely European Union."

Looking at how being a member of the EU and NATO has affected relations with Russia, she said: "You know, it certainly has had an effect, but if you ask me how, then I'd like to hope that Russia has pulled back a bit. But at the same time I feel that I still cannot understand them. But it is like that, that many don't understand it. [Also] at the same time I'm quite angry with the European Union at times. That they hunch down in front of Russia like that, you know. There's constantly this feeling that more could be done [by the EU]. And I am not sure if they, if they… Well we know about this, the situation a lot better than anyone else. Do they take us as seriously [as they should]?!"

"Well it is clear, life and history have shown, that it's not the small countries who make history, it's the large ones." When asked whether Estonia's position is heard at all in the EU, her response was: "No, definitely they do [take it into account]. […] Or at least

it seems to me as an ordinary person (*tavainimene*), that they occasionally do. But I also think that if Latvia and Lithuania join [our stance], it'll be even better. And who do we have backing us at the moment? Well Poland is a strong partner, a large country. […] In a word, in a sense that they take us more seriously perhaps when three countries are saying the same thing about let's say Russia."

Based on the above, a clear interconnection can be brought out within the security aspect in Estonian national identity construction. In terms of Russia, the threat emanating from there was still perceived as real although diminished. At the same time, this threat is utilised on two layers of the EU/NATO sphere. First, the respondents expressed concern over EU/NATO's ability to see Russia for its real intentions, which, with Russia's various actions and statements, can only be seen as a true concern. This concern provides a ground for underlying the security aspect on the EU/NATO level and therefore along with the threat perception from Russia creates the identity construction of 'more Western than the West' i.e. having a truer understanding of and attachment to the Western values and the need to defend them. The past experiences in the Soviet Union and the wider narrative of suffering/victimisation also provide a backdrop for this approach.

Another important aspect, which emerges from the excerpts above is the depiction of Russia as incomprehensible. There appear to be two interlinked narratives in place at the same time – given the historical background and experience the Estonians understand Russia better than the 'West', but at the same within the construction of Estonia belonging to the Western value system and Othering Russia from that level, Russia is seen as incomprehensible within this frame of thought. On the international level this translates to Estonia understanding how truly unpredictable Russia is, and that this needs to be taken on board more fully by the 'West'. These competing narratives can be looked at from different layers, which I argue, all have a degree of validity to them. The deeper insight into the workings of the Russian state is certainly considered legitimate by the respondents and the political elite in Estonia. However, there remains a degree of inexplicability attached to Russia's motivations and actions placing it outside the realm of European values, which would be required for 'normalisation' of relations. This next section addresses these so-called Orientalising practices in more depth.

6.2.5 RUSSIA – THE CULTURAL 'OTHER'

As Darieva and Kaschuba (2007) have pointed out, emphasising contrasting ideologies, geographies and histories as part of a process of 'escaping from Russia' plays an important role in Estonia's self-narration. Orientalising Russia has remained one of the core element of Estonia's national identity construction in the post-2004 period. In line with Merje Kuus' (2002) argument, I argue that Russia continued to be Othered post-2004 (up to 2014), and even though the security dimension has been retained in this to a degree, an emphasis has been placed on a different, cultural way of Othering. Becoming a 'normal' European country (prior to 2014) implies that the security concerns have diminished and Russia was Othered more in terms of European values than any specific threat Estonia might face as a country. There were indications that this type of cultural Othering was already present during the Soviet period and in this sense it falls back on long-held understandings.

> "When we came to live here in 67' then I came up with two women right outside this window. They were Russians. […] They made a lot of noise and said that 'we came to bring culture to the Estonians'. I stopped and she said 'what? Did you not understand? We came to bring culture to you' (mockingly)." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

This depiction of a whole different culture - that the Russians were there to 'bring' - and also in terms of how she described the attitude of the people making these statements about bringing culture (an indication that Estonia had no culture, conveyed in a condescending manner, or at least a different kind of culture) - was completely incompatible with what the interviewee saw as Estonianness ('they made a lot of noise'). The respondent used this example to specifically draw out the differences between the Estonians and Russians who came to Estonia during the Soviet period. In this sense the culture (and through that also value system) was seen as incompatible with the Russian/Soviet one.

Because of the higher standards of living in the Pribaltika region, Estonia (and Latvia and Lithuania) became known as 'our West' in the Soviet Union (Brüggemann 2007: 149), supporting the understanding that Estonia was repressed by an externally-imposed regime holding it back economically. This view is further supported by the success Estonia had after regaining independence.

> "I think that it [Russia] is a little bit hurt (*natuke solvuma pani*) by the fact that Estonia started to develop so quickly. I think that this pose (referring to the caricature) of this slightly disappointed and a little bit hurt bear is completely justified here." (Mart, 50, Brussels).

The comparison between Russia's economic stagnation compared to Estonia's fast development after regaining independence was also highlighted by a respondent from nearby the Russian border in Estonia.

> "The Russian tourist says that it is like their current life that we show in our museum [in Setomaa]. [There is] the wealthier household of the beginning of the 20th century at the museum – that this is their present-day life." (Laila, 55, Setomaa).

The cultural Othering is reflected both in the mainstream media (see below) and in how most of the Estonian-speaking respondents related to various topics regarding Russia. However, there again seem to be several interconnected aspects to this identity construction. Russia was called 'a land of wonders and surprises' by some respondents, while others stated that trying to understand its motives is 'mystifying' (see quote on page 168), which can be interpreted as a way of distancing themselves to a degree on a state level from the so-called Eastern mind-set which Russia is perceived to occupy.

> "I think that perhaps in some sense we can feel safer now. Because Russia is a land of wonders and surprises. I like it in the sense that we, with our backs against the border, that we have this border. Fewer pickpockets (*pesuvaras*) get through to here (*jõuab siia*) than before." (Laila, 55, Setomaa).

On the other hand, however, it appears to be balanced again with the narrative of 'understanding Russia's real intentions' better on a European level. As stated earlier, the negotiation of Europeanness constitutes a constant background in the Estonian-Russian relationship, with both denying the legitimacy of the other. This can be seen in the top-down discourse with an example drawn here from an Estonian daily paper editorial during the Georgian War in 2008.

> "Since Saakashvili is a democrat (or at least on his way there), then we can support him, advise him, but if necessary, also criticise him. Democrats can [do that] between one another. A crook is a crook and it would make no sense [to do that] with them" (Editorial, Eesti Päevaleht, 15.08.2008).

This Orientalising discourse was reflected on also on a grassroots level. Quite a few Estonian-speaking respondents referred to Russia as a backward and unpredictable country, whose actions are based on a framework inaccessible for the Western democratic understanding. This approach was utilised by the respondents to distance themselves from the 'Eastern' mentality and reaffirm belonging to the 'Western' value system.

> "[…] I think that this our neighbourly relationship is surely not one of rationality. It is emotional. And for me it is emotional of course. There is this constant thought (*mõte*) at the back of the head that Russia cannot ever be 100% trusted, I think. Because they are so unpredictable in their behaviour. And since it's such a large country, I don't think it'll ever give 100% up on its expansionist ambitions. And in that sense joining the EU and NATO is a security guarantee (*tagatis*), according to my personal opinion." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

Examples of this distancing came through particularly when discussing the reasoning behind the Bronze soldier incident. The chaotic and incomprehensible Eastern mentality was seen as contributing to the events that unfolded at the end of April 2007.

> "One of the explanations for why they reacted to the Bronze Soldier as they did, is […] that it's, I don't know, it's in their genes. It's mystifying, but to draw any conclusions from that… We will never understand this. […] Such disbelief, this kind of disgusting and unbelievable, because vandalism has always been repulsive (*vastu käinud*) to me – it's unpleasant. I was watching it on TV […] and it was unbelievable that something like this is happening [in Estonia] because we have always considered ourselves to be this kind of reserved and intelligent country and now something like this which was totally mystifying." (Eveli, 48, Brussels).

As can be seen from the quote above, the actions contributed to the Russian-speaking population in Estonia during the Bronze soldier riots in 2007, are separated from the so-called Estonian mind-set ('reserved and intelligent' vs 'vandalism') and framed in a primordial and unchangeable manner ('it's in their genes'), to a degree that is completely inconceivable ('totally mystifying'). The Bronze Night events clearly provide an exaggerated context for Othering Russian-speakers and for generalising the perception of Russian mentality for the Estonian-speaking respondents. This understanding, however, was not shared by the Russian-speaking respondents, who placed little emphasis on the differences

between the countries or people living there or were perhaps reluctant to discuss these with me.

> "I see all of them as the same – both Russians and Estonians. It's the mentality that is obviously different. The Estonians are quieter." (Aleksey, 52, Tallinn).

Following from here the shift towards more pragmatic line of thought in relations with Russia will be addressed.

6.3 A NEO(LIBERAL) NORMALITY IN RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

As discussed in Chapter 1, the first free parliamentary election in 1992 brought a right-centre coalition to power who supported the radical marketisation and Westernisation of Estonia's economy and implemented 'shock-therapy' (Lauristin and Vihalemm 2009: 9). The popular support for these reform policies was high during the transition period and one of the main elements guiding this transition was breaking free of Russia's economic influence and achieve economic sustainability. The common-sense of neoliberal hegemony has not been seriously tested or questioned in Estonia even after 'successfully' transforming into a Western market state and joining the EU structures over a decade ago. While the economic crisis, that hit Estonia relatively hard in 2008-2009, brought about protests and calls for change in the financial sector in various other European countries (e.g. Greece, Portugal, Spain), it had little significant political consequences in Estonia. The consequence of the crisis can therefore be interpreted as strengthening the neoliberal political paradigm (Thorhallsson and Kattel 2013: 94). As already discussed in the previous chapter regarding Estonian self-positioning in Europe and relations with the EU, this neoliberal paradigm has shaped the understandings of respondents with regard to national identity also in relations with Russia.

> "Our threshold for suffering and economic capability is still so small. We are dependent on a lot of export. […] Actually I'd say that the economy is the very basis for everything – when our economy is doing fine then we are all fine, but when it's doing poorly, we are all doing poorly. Now they call

> this diplomacy – to find the markets and opportunities, but well…" (Tõnu, 57, Central Estonia).

The pragmatic line of thinking was seen in other Western countries, which in itself also provided a justification for arguing for better economic relations with Russia. Although, as can be seen in the quote below, the balancing between values and economic pragmatism is not straightforward and there is detectable concern that perhaps too much emphasis is being placed on profitability, which could prove problematic in terms of undermining shared values and security. This frame of thought, prior to the Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2014 and before economic and political sanctions were implemented on Russia, can be seen in this quote:

> "It can be seen elsewhere, where Russia has actually attacked that the Western countries, USA and Germany, don't want [to intervene]. They have their gas pipes and that matters more. […] Well you could see with the Bronze Night how politics comes into play. One thing is politics, another thing is business and money, and you can't fight (*tülli minema*) with Russia on that. Nobody wants to get into a fight, not a single country because of, I don't know the important goods that are moved around here… You could see during the Bronze Night that nobody really wanted to speak up. Germany didn't want to say anything. I am not too certain that it would come to help." (Katrin, 32, Tallinn).

The aim here is not to provide an explanation as to the reasons behind the relative economic success or refute the claims that the combination of factors contributed to Estonia's economic progress, but to provide a background for understanding how the respondents have internalised this 'economic success' and what impact this has on their understandings of the Estonian national identity.

Additionally, what should be kept in mind and will be further discussed in the next chapter focusing on everyday perspectives, is that the security dimension within the Estonian national identity construction in relation to Russia, is still pertinent, but almost a decade since accession to the EU and NATO, this construction has lost some of its relevance.

> "I don't think that [people] in Estonia (*seal Eestis*)… that there has been too much worrying about security in everyday life. Perhaps leaving aside 1991 when we had the tanks visiting, then everything else has been ... [just fine]. Well, there is always this subconscious [thought, feeling] that one cannot make 100% long plans, considering the geographical position Estonia has. But I don't think that anyone would constantly worry about something

[like that] before going to bed at night and falling asleep. I very much doubt that. […].” (Mart, 50, Brussels)

The very quick transformation that occurred from national development goals to individualistic values and consumerist orientations with limited criticism of this neoliberal paradigm by the people in Estonia is certainly something that deserves to be analysed alongside the security-related Othering of Russia discussed in the previous section. Looking at how the respondents discussed relations with Russia through this prism, a different, little-explored perspective emerges.

Even though people in Estonia demonstrated a high level of contentment with ‘shock therapy’ reforms, which has been attributed to the specific features of hegemonic liberal ‘transition culture’ (Lauristin 2009: 613) and there was almost no public unrest during the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009, a certain amount of fatigue could be detected when the respondents discussed economic issues. In 2006, the then prime minister Andrus Ansip spoke about taking Estonia into the five top richest countries in Europe (*„Viime Eesti viie jõukaima Euroopa riigi hulka!”*) as part of the 2007 Reform Party general election campaign. While in 2006 this might have been perceived as somewhat plausible given the double digits economic growth at the time, the same statement quickly became a subject of irony in the media and general public during and after the economic crisis demonstrating the shift in the expectations of further economic development. This shift translates into various themes related to national identity, one of which is how relations with Russia were perceived by the respondents.

6.3.1 ‘YOU SHOULD GET ALONG WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURS’ - RATIONALISING RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

During the economic crisis, austerity measures were widely accepted in Estonia and, as discussed in the previous chapter, this approach is utilised in the public discourse to Other Southern European countries while simultaneously constructing an idea of ‘true’ Europe. However, when looking into Othering Russia, an interesting aspect of identity-construction emerges in regard to the economy. The general acceptance of Orientalising Russia on a political level has left its imprint

on how the economic relations with Russia are perceived on a grassroots level, but the unrealistic expectation of economic growth and the following disappointment has resulted in 'rationalising' improving relations with Russia for possible economic development.

This issue is approached relatively carefully by the Estonian-speaking respondents and is at times conflated to a certain degree with security dimension of Estonia's identity-construction vis-à-vis Russia. However, the underlying neoliberal principles, which have been highlighted throughout the independence period and have become an important part of Estonia's national image, were utilised by the respondents to detach the economic relations with Russia from the political/security related elements discussed in the previous section. Emphasis was placed on a globalised economy, the importance of economic welfare in the present-day world and 'rational' relations to the extent of separating out politics from more personal trade relations across the border. In this regard, the respondents maintained the national esteem of Estonia by not giving any concessions to Russia while at the same time remaining firmly within the pragmatic neoliberal framework, one of the positive national identity-construction features in Estonia.

The three aspects through which economic relations with Russia were framed by the respondents were: 1) the challenges of a globalised economy; 2) the practicalities of cooperating with the 'next-door neighbour'; and 3) separation of people from the state in relations with Russia. This almost apologetic and rationalising approach was evident in both language groups interviewed, even though the reasoning behind it could be argued to differ to a degree.

The importance of good economic relations in a globalised world and especially in the aftermath of the economic crisis comes through in the interview data. The previously mentioned exogenous nature of economic crisis has been embraced in how economic matters are discussed. As one respondent said: "and we also certainly don't want to be affected again by the world economic or god knows which other effects" (Tõnu, 57, Central Estonia), again implying that any possible problems could be created by the 'outside world' solely, almost separating Estonia from the 'globalised world' in any negative sense. In this sense, the understanding

of Estonia as a small, open, export-oriented and competitive economy being vulnerable and unable to dictate external trends (Jurkynas 2014: 121), could be seen in the interview data. However, the capitalist market values and the path Estonia had chosen in this regard were not questioned and provided a background framework for processing relations with Russia as one of the complex identity-constructing elements.

> "Such a small region economically, time has shown that we can't manage without connections. We don't have everything – we need to import. We need to [export] agricultural products. We can't consume all of these ourselves (if we work hard). This was evident already in the Soviet time when the collective farms [here] supplied and fed Moscow and Petersburg. So what if they did? At least they got to give away their products right? They didn't give it away for nothing either. So in that sense there I haven't heard of anyone having any animosity here against the Russian people or the Russian state." (Martin, 69, Setomaa).

Similar points were also made by the Russian-speaking respondents. The economic issues, however, are seen as a uniting element for the Estonian- and Russian-speakers since this is perceived relatively separately from the history narratives and detached from the more emotional realm of identity-construction. Although the reasoning behind it can be interpreted slightly differently. Very simplistically put, the Estonian-speaking respondents saw that with emphasising better relations with Russia through an economic prism, they would not be undermining the political agenda; at the same time, Russian-speakers (in Narva specifically) felt generally more comfortable criticising Estonian economic policy and depicting Russia in a more positive light via economic arguments since this was seen separately from the more contentious matters of security for example.

> "We must live in a modern world somehow. And, that means that with Russia it is necessary to be friends, to be on good terms economically (*в плане экономически дружить*). And it's very useful and very profitable ... and, I do not know, but only stupid people do not understand that. Because you can get a lot from Russia. And it would be profitable for Estonia. But, apparently, there is some national resentment, which prevent our Estonian politicians from improving the relations." (Dmitry, 27, Narva).

The implication from the quote from an interview held in Narva is that in his view Estonia's prosperity depends on improved relations with Russia. With the Estonian respondents the implication appeared to be that Estonia as an open, forward-thinking globalised economy highly dependent on trade should seek to engage

equally with all potential partners – the particular situation with Russia means that possibilities are extremely limited, but at least Estonia is trying to engage with Russia on these terms.

Another 'excuse' which emerged from the interview data was depicting Russia simply as a neighbouring country, and following the capitalist understanding of maximising profits, it was claimed that Estonia ought to utilise the past experience and proximity to its benefit.

> "We need Russia as a trade partner, well because they're our neighbours and nothing can be done about that. One has to adapt (*mugandada*) oneself. And Estonia has plenty of privileges since a lot of Estonians speak Russian very well. In reality we should take advantage of this situation. Much more than we've done so far. It is our curse and blessing (she laughs)." (Eveli, 48, Brussels).

The economic element has been almost removed from the more emotional national identity elements like history, although it was also brought in as a supplement to the main rationale of upholding the free market values with one respondent referring to Estonian historic roots and using a proverb to explain why the relations should be improved:

> "There is this proverb [which says] that you don't choose your neighbours, you have to get along with your neighbours." (Tõnu, 57, Central Estonia).

A third aspect highlighted by respondents from rural areas in particular was the local and more personal nature of trading with the Russians living in the border areas. This was seen as a mutually beneficial arrangement which was separated from the state level politics. Plainly put, people from or living in rural areas would have liked to see the border dispute (referred to in Chapter 1) solved and the border more open for trade, but at the same time are not willing to compromise on any other level. In this sense the economic rationalisation is hidden behind a façade of national self-esteem.

The practicalities of being able to move across the border and sell produce on the Russian side were discussed by several respondents in mostly Central and Southeast Estonia. Several respondents from these areas spoke about the former benefits of economic trade with Russians from the bordering areas during the

Soviet times, and through that highlighted the possible benefits that Russia as a neighbouring country has to offer. Although the conflicting historical narratives with Russia surrounding the Second World War are a prominent feature in Estonian national identity construction, another view into a shared or common history within the Soviet Union brings out the experience of having beneficial agricultural trade relations with Russians, which could possibly be utilised again.

> "I was placed to work in Võrumaa when I was young. In Obinitsa, which is 9 km from Pechora, the Russian border. At the time the border was open. There was no ESSR/ENSV – oh there was one sign where the ESSR started. Pechora was a much bigger and important city for the Estonian people living on the border than Võru or some Tartu was. People didn't go to those places. Everything was done in Pechora. All of the eggs and milk was taken by bus to Pechora in the mornings and sold there at the market. Eder, what they drank there all of the time, was bought in Pechora. […] I think that this Estonia-Russian problem has more to do with this border. […] So I would say that in general Estonian-Russian relations are not that bad. But for some reason poor Paet has to struggle because Lavrov withdrew his signature. There's something wrong with the preamble again." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

While on the top-down level there seems to have been little real expectation of normalising relations with Russia when joining the EU and NATO, this expectation is still reflected somewhat on a grassroots level. The fact that contentious issues remain a part of the political agenda is not surprising, but a certain amount of blame for not normalising the economic trade with Russia is also placed on the Estonian political elite. This conveys a growing distance from the elite, which has become more and more apparent across the wider Europe, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. From how the economic relations were discussed in the rural areas, there seems to have been the expectation that the economic relations will 'normalise' in the sense of trading more freely with people living in Russia. Some of the respondents appeared almost apologetic in their desire for improved economic relations with Russia, provided explanations based on personal experiences and distanced the Russian people living in the border areas from the state level relations.

> "I don't think that the relations are good with Russia. All this border affair which is closed down. Let's take our own county. […] Our Peipsi region, which has been left in a poor state. In the old days, when the border [was open] – well when we could still go to Russia – people grew cucumbers and trade was simple with Russia. From right here in Pajusi people used to take cucumbers to Russia and people used to work late at night… But they

> wanted to go and this was all allowed and they got paid for selling their product there. Trading was easier, but now they made it so difficult. Why couldn't trading be better? Of course I don't know about the larger transits and what not, but in the ordinary countryside… The Peipsi regions used to live so well, they built houses, but now this is all being neglected (*unarusse*) thanks to the fact that they can't take anything across the border." (Kaili, 70, Central Estonia).

In this sense, it was the Russian state, which was still depicted as 'chaotic and arbitrary', but the Russian people as sharing similar economic values to the ones in Estonia. The relations with Russians in the border regions were seen as rather friendly and beneficial for both sides, not only individually but also for regional development.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored Russia as the Other in Estonian national identity constructions and brought out the role it plays in Estonian 'normality'. It looked into the idea of 'normalising' relations with Russia by examining the conflicting historical narratives and Orientalising practices. While securitisation of Russia is still evident in how the respondents discussed the relations between the two countries, the chapter demonstrates that an emphasis has been placed on a different, cultural way of Othering. Becoming a 'normal' European country implies that the security concerns have diminished (prior to 2014) and Russia had become Othered more in terms of European values than any specific threat Estonia might face as a country.

The second, and no less important development emerging from the data was framing the more pragmatic approach in strengthening economic ties with Russia within the wider national identity construction. Since the beginning of the 1990s and the introduction of the shock-therapy reforms, economy has played a significant role in Estonia's national identity constructions. Improving economy and through that people's well-being in Estonia and the radical reforms that the political elite undertook at the beginning of the 1990s was constructed as a higher national goal which had to be endured in order to achieve the success envisioned. This has been a successful rhetoric, which is demonstrated by how the respondents

discussed Russia through an economic lens. The interviews revealed that relations with Russia were conceived in terms of the neoliberal economic narrative that had taken hold during the EU accession period and which is used to position Estonia within the framework of the enlarged EU. Having spent almost a decade in the EU and NATO in relatively calm times in terms of security, the chapter demonstrates that a certain normalisation – different to that which had been articulated as a goal in the 1990s - had been achieved in relation to Russia and that pragmatic economic themes had become more relevant in people's everyday perceptions. As to reconciliation of the pragmatic understanding related to the neoliberal agenda and the emotional historical elements of national identity construction, the year 2014 demonstrated why relying more on the pragmatic perspective can have possibly dangerous consequences when dealing with Russia.

Turning towards the everyday aspects in Estonia, and from the 'external' perspectives to the 'internal' ones, the following chapter will explore everyday life in Estonia more detail. It will look into how people discuss life and work in Estonia including the already much debated issue of societal integration.

CHAPTER 7. LIVING THE ESTONIAN 'NORMALITY'

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The first two empirical chapters explored post-EU accession understandings of the Estonian Self from the standpoint of its relationship to two (distinct yet also inter-related) external Others - the positive and the negative, Europe and Russia. This chapter focuses on the understandings that emerge from how people talk about everyday life and work within Estonia. While it is hard to draw a clear distinction between the internal and external in all this, the primary focus here is on the internal essence of Estonia as a state in all its dimensions nearly a decade on from EU accession. The issues to emerge from the interviews based on the key events discussed are: societal integration, impact of economic changes on everyday life and nature of the political system. Similarly to the framework introduced in the last chapter, the everyday experiences of the participants will be analysed here from the standpoint of the dominant neoliberal paradigm underpinning constructions of Estonian 'normality' as well as from the more emotional, securitised angle in terms of the interethnic relations in Estonia.

The chapter is broadly divided into three sections based on the key issues that emerged from the interview data. The first section looks at societal integration through the topic of language and how the role of education has contributed to the wider discussions on integration. It also brings out the perceived cultural differences, which are partly related to perceptions of what constitutes 'normal' Russian behaviour. It looks into how salient are ethnic divisions and if so, then to what extent. The second section focuses on how pragmatic economic terms were utilised to discuss interethnic relations in Estonia. I argue that the reconciliation between the pragmatic understanding of economic necessity and the more

national emotional element is pertinent in understanding interethnic relations in Estonia a decade since joining the Western structures.

The third section addresses what understandings of the political community have emerged amongst Estonia's residents. It looks into how the respondents discussed the wider political landscape and certain prominent political actors in Estonia in order to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of this 'normal' European country and its political 'normality' nearly a decade after formally becoming one.

This chapter thus explores the internal essence of Estonia as a state in all its dimensions, in order to complement and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the various aspects related to Estonian national identity constructions and through that perceptions of 'normality' in post-accession Estonia. Jutta Weldes has explained the relevance of domestic roots in how states present themselves on the international arena and says that only looking at the external i.e. treating the state as a black box whose internal workings are irrelevant to the construction of state identity and interests, is bordering on 'anthropomorphisation and oversimplification' (Weldes 1999: 9). She explains that the meanings that objects, events and actions have for states are the meanings they have for the individuals who act in the name of the state, and they approach international politics with an already quite comprehensive and elaborate appreciation of the world, and of their state's self-positioning in the international system (Weldes 1999: 9). This appreciation comes from the collective meanings constructed at least in part in the domestic political and cultural contexts (Weldes 1999: 9). These contexts have been discussed to a degree in Chapter 2 and this chapter aims to further the already existing understandings with adding a perspective from the ground-up.

Looking into the internal essence of Estonian state can enhance our understanding of how the Others discussed in the previous two chapters are intertwined in this process of imagining their nation through a variety of more meaningful everyday local themes. While looking at the internal in terms of aiming to achieve a better understanding of how people in Estonia perceive 'normality' forms the centrepiece of this research, the previous two chapters have dealt with how they see Estonia's self-positioning in the international context and why that may be.

This chapter looks into the related but more local relevant themes that are intertwined with the perception of Others discussed earlier but adds value in terms of bringing out other complex points of reference for constructing 'normality' in post-accession Estonia.

As said, the relevance of the international system and norms is not extracted from the domestic level; rather the domestic and the international are viewed here as mutually constitutive for gaining an understanding of the process of constructing Estonian national identity. This means that taking a closer look at the frames in which themes of societal integration are approached, a highly important political, economic and cultural issue in Estonia as highlighted by the extensive research referred to in Chapter 3, can reveal a lot about the constructions of national identity and through that the perception of 'normality'. This chapter also discusses how larger goals or projects related to national identification and attempts at branding are framed by the respondents. It also brings to light how the respondents discussed the wider political landscape and certain prominent political actors in Estonia in order to help understand the perceptions of the internal to complement the external elements discussed in the previous empirical chapters.

7.2 SOCIETAL INTEGRATION

The situation of Russian-speakers in Estonia has been discussed thoroughly through a variety of platforms. This subject was of particular of interest for scholars in the 1990s and appeared to have lost some of its relevance with Estonia 'ticking the boxes' in 2004 with EU and NATO accession. However, the formal adherence to the conditions relating to minority rights in Estonia has not resulted in an ideally and meaningfully integrated society. As one might expect, the relevance of ethnic and ethno-linguistic boundaries has not disappeared in the Estonian society. But how do these boundaries manifest themselves in the way that people talk about everyday life? Have these dividing lines in the society become the 'normal' and to what degree is this understanding internalised also by the Russian-speakers in Estonia? The existing divisions do not seem to only follow an ethnic dimension but

run through an array of various social segmentations with understandings of ethnic separation as part of this complex web of societal relations. This section looks into these perceptions on the ground and brings out the more subtle picture of the relations between Estonian- and Russian-speakers after nearly a decade in the EU and in the aftermath of the economic crisis.

As discussed in Chapter 4, in order to explore these relations, I conducted interviews with both Estonian- and Russian-speakers in Estonia. The interviews were normally held in the first language of the participants – their domestic language. Most of the interviews were held in Estonian, but I also did four interviews in Russian and one in Estonian with Russian-speakers in Narva, a town bordering Russia in the North-East of Estonia where the ethnic Estonian population is only 3.75%[11]. Additionally, two interviews in Tallinn were held with Russian-speakers (one respondent was of Belarusian background with Russian as his domestic language).

The interview data suggest that the Estonian-speaking respondents viewed accession to the EU as a signal of approval of state policies relating to national minorities by the existing EU member states. Having allegedly 'ticked the boxes' for membership appeared to provide validation for how respondents perceived the still prevailing general attitudes towards how integration with the Russian-speaking minority should be processed i.e. Estonia has done all that is necessary for successful integration and any persisting integration issues were perceived to be come from the Russian-speaking community in Estonia not doing their part.

From the interview data, there still appeared to be a generalised understanding that Estonia should be consolidated as a nation-state rather than a multi-national civic society and that the Russian-speaking population should 'integrate' according to the terms set by the majority, core nation. This coincides with the vision of 'normality' set in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which appears to continue to serve as a 'thicker point of reference' for perceptions of national identity in the post-accession context. The interview data also suggest that limited emphasis was placed upon the formal requirements (e.g. in terms of gaining citizenship) and that more general attitudes towards the state and society

[11] Narva City Population Registration Office; Ethnic composition of population as of 01.01.2014

(e.g. in terms of language, culture and education) were accentuated as the most relevant to the integration process.

7.2.1 "IF YOU LIVE IN ESTONIA, YOU SHOULD LEARN THE LANGUAGE!"

Language has been a controversial issue in the integration process in Estonia. In 2008, the UN Human Rights Council published a special report on Estonia, which stated that members of the Russophone community expressed the view that the most important form of discrimination in Estonia is not ethnic, but rather language-based. In particular, it affects directly the Russian-speaking persons who either migrated or were born in Estonia during the period of the Soviet occupation (UNHRC report[12], 2008, p 15). It is not surprising that the issue of language was of core importance among the respondents when discussing relations between Estonian- and Russian-speakers. The language issue was intertwined in various topics (e.g. history narratives, education, economics/job market) and will also be addressed throughout these themes.

> "They can easily be here, there is nothing bad about that. It's just that if they live in Estonia then they should like know Estonian and I think that that is correct if they learn Estonian and not that they go to Russian nurseries and such. […] Well fine, let's say that the schools at least should be Estonian. Fine, Russian nurseries, I can understand that, but then at least the schools should be Estonian not like Russian. I think I want an easier life, my thinking is too simplistic (she laughs)." (Linda, 34, Tallinn).

The quotes above and below demonstrate that while learning the language if you live in Estonia is non-negotiable, then as said, it relates more to the attitude towards learning it i.e. that there is the respect for the local language and the willingness to learn it, that appears to be of key importance.

> "Some Russians are very good (*tublid*), we get along very well, there is no problem. They learn the language and I always like it when (s)he has learned the language and speaks with an accent like that (she smiles), but

[12] UNHRC Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mission to Estonia, 2008 (https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G08/117/59/PDF/G0811759.pdf?OpenElement; accessed 08.01.2016)

> (s)he wants to talk, and even if (s)he doesn't come into contact so much with Estonians, (s)he still tries to speak, with hands and legs… But then there are people who say on principle 'I will not speak Estonian'. [...] We have one here in the countryside – now (s)he already passed away – [lived here for] decades and speaks a couple of words. (S)he simply doesn't speak […] and doesn't want to speak. For her/him the Estonian language is nothing, (s)he only thinks about her/his own language. But there are also very very nice (*mõnusaid*) people. I haven't come across anyone who would be like against and doesn't want to speak." (Kaili, 70, Central Estonia).

Some resonance can be also seen in the quotes above with the foreign policy objectives of the 1990s and normalisation of relations with Russia narrative (i.e. having relations as with any other country in Europe). However, this seemed to be articulated by the Estonian-speaking respondents in terms of rationalising the emotional nationalistic understanding. It was usually added as a subclause to the main argument of 'if you live in Estonia, you should learn the language' which is firmly rooted in the idea of an Estonian nation state. This can be attributed to enhancing the self-esteem of a nation in relation to dismissing any claims by Russia who tries to hold on to its perceived sphere of influence.

> "Well I personally think that if you have the opportunity as a child in school to learn different languages then you should take advantage of that – including Russian. If you take a radical stance that I will not learn Russian, then you lose out on that whole cultural space or the opportunity to use the language yourself and consume culture in that language, in the original language which is always better than consuming it through translation, through mediation." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

One of the main events signifying problems of integration in Estonia was the Bronze soldier incident in 2007. An image of the looting and a cartoon of the Prime Minister Andrus Ansip at the relocated monument was used during the interview process. While discussing this event with the respondents provided a more conflictual layer to how they viewed ethnic relations in Estonia and should be viewed in this context, it also contributed to opening up the respondents' still prevalent perspectives on the topic, even if heightened to a degree.

Not surprisingly the Bronze soldier incident received a strong reaction from the Estonian-speaking respondents while the Russian-speakers were somewhat reluctant to discuss this issue with me. How the Estonian-speakers addressed the incident is looked at here through three different but connected themes, which

were viewed as impacting the integration process: conflicting perceptions of history, cultural differences and educational system.

First, as could be expected, the conflicting historical narratives were perceived as immutable and non-negotiable. From an Estonian-speaker's angle, the contradicting view of the Second World War within the Russian discourse was seen as irreconcilable with the Estonian perspective.

> "Utter hopelessness. That we will never integrate with the Russians. Never. Probably. I don't think that my generation. Perhaps my children, perhaps they will integrate, but they also constantly hear that… "Russians". And sometimes you need to control yourself – that little kids go to kindergarten and say "Russians" (she laughs). Perhaps even the next generation won't integrate. Maybe someday it will be forgotten, but… [currently] the feeling of hopelessness." (Katrin, 32, Tallinn).

A degree of Orientalising the Russian-speaking community in terms of Second World War history narratives came through in the interviews with Estonian-speakers. There appeared to be a generalised understanding within this topic that an 'insufficient' amount of time has passed for the Second World War or the following Soviet occupation to lose its significance in the everyday discourses. The implication of this is that nothing could be done about addressing these differences now - it is merely a matter of letting time take its course, and future generations will have a different attitude to the past whereby 'normality' will be attained. However, this was related back to only the Russian-speaking community and not seen as factor for the Estonian-speakers, which appears to cut against how 'integration' has been presented in Estonia since 2000, as something implying attitudinal shifts in both communities, rather than just one.

> "[The Russian] hasn't developed this type of patriotism towards the Estonian state. At least that generation, who was out there on the streets. […] I hope it [the patriotism is an option] is, it probably is, but it takes such a long time. The generational change will need to happen and then I think that things will start to proceed faster. It's just that the gap is too big right now. Too many sufferers are in it. Everybody knows what happened 20 years ago or well, before that." (Tarmo, 27, Tallinn).

The integration process related to the conflicting historical narratives and the cultural Othering was seen as possibly changing through shifts in the attitudes of the Russian-speakers in terms of education and learning the Estonian language.

Even though this does not coincide with the concept of integration as put forward by the EU, there were no voices among the respondents suggesting that this process was seen in any way outside the 'normal' frames for dealing with this complicated issue in the country, considering the historical experince it had had and the claims that Russia is making. The aspirational quality in having a 'normal' society can be seen in how the respondents negotiated this issue, but this society appeared to be more inclined towards the understandings of a nation-state put forward in the 1990s rather than a multi-national civic one.

The matter is more complex since Russia uses the tensions over history and language to create further divisions in the Estonian society and reinforces the pre-existing domestic norms that do not coincide with European minority rights standards (Schulze 2010: 361). As has been pointed out, Russia has used a variety of mechanisms (military, economic, propaganda, disinformation campaigns) to get the Estonian government to adopt more accommodative policies toward its Russian-speaking minority (Schulze 2010: 362), which can be interpreted more in terms of trying to hinder Estonia's claim to Europeanness and also attemps to keep it as part of its sphere of influence as discussed in Chapters 3 and 6, rather than the genuine desire for more inclusive policies for the Russian-speaking population there.

The quote below demonstrates the complexity in how a young Estonian-speaking respondent expressed his opinion on the topic. The Soviet era repressive migration policies and Estonia's suffering under the oppressive rule are brought forward, and in this sense, requirements for learning the language and participating as a 'normal' person in the Estonian social world is seen as meeting 'half-way' by this Estonian-speaker.

> "I think it's 50-50. There are 50% of those who still persevere (*jonni ajama*) and 50% accept the fact that they no longer live in the Russian Federation but they live in Estonia (*Eesti riigis*). […] I think what they hold against the Estonian state is the fact that we don't have Russian as an official language and so on, that they have been like royalty here (*kuningaseisuses*) and since that no longer exists, then I think that all things related to Estonia make them angry. […] There are a lot of Russian (*vene rahvusest*) people [here] who are very nice and understand and learn the language but there are also the kind of people who've lived here for centuries and don't learn the

> language and think that they can just slide (*liugu laskma*) through [at others expense] and are allowed to do anything [they want]." (Raul, 22, Tallinn).

The second aspect that came through the interviews in the context of the Bronze Soldier incident with Estonian-speakers was the cultural Othering of Russian-speakers in Estonia. The cultural differences were seen as both incomprehensible and immutable at the same time. Again, as mentioned in Chapter 5 (Othering Southern Europe) and Chapter 6 (Othering Russia), the so-called 'temperament' was seen as the main difference between the ethnic groups in Estonia.

> "For the Russian the Second World War is such an important thing that you can […] talk to them as much as you want, but they will stick to that. […] Just like it was on Discovery the other day, that in reality 2000 women got raped by the Soviet army in Germany during the Second World War. This is all written down but not discussed. But try to say that now to a veteran. You'll get told you're a fascist and that's it because they've been brought up like that. In my old position, there were a wife and husband working. It was very difficult to discuss these issues with the husband, but the wife said that "don't talk to him, he is the son of a soldier". You can tell him what you want but he's been raised since a child with certain convictions and you won't change him. You can say what you want. […] The regular person (as opposed to the soldiers) is more understanding." (Priit, 49, Tallinn).

The perceptions of what constitutes 'normal' Russian behaviour came through from the interviews. Understandings of what is perceived as an inherently Russian approach to various aspects of life and that what otherwise could have constituted as 'normal' people, have been ruined by the 'abnormal' education, and home environment which has probably gone through a similar path (further exacerbated by Russian media campaigns). This can be viewed as Othering not in terms of ethnicity *per se* but rather in terms of assigned belonging to a kind of 'underclass' – the ones who don't understand Estonian 'normality' (see discussion below up to page 190).

> "It was the year after, the monument wasn't there any longer, and it was 9th of May again, the Victory Day and can you imagine, right here [near the St Nicholas church] a young woman is [walking], [she's] over 20 and has a small child, who hasn't heard of the 'Great Patriotic War' (*isamaasõda*) or nothing, carrying red carnations and walking towards the monument [where it used to be]. I was thinking that, dear me (*santa klaara küll*), how is it that people who know nothing about the war – by whom and how have they been raised, that they go there, right." (Greta, 52, Tallinn).

Another young respondent from a rural Southern Estonian village related the Bronze soldier incident to the 'Russian soul' referring to more primordial, inherent characteristics rather than cultural differences. Her quote brings out the complex nature of the interethnic relations with difficulties understanding this mentality even within her own family.

> "It's funny to think that this type of thing happened here. […] Where does it come from? Well, this Russian stuff doesn't really sit with me. I thought like it was okay that they removed it from there. […] When I think about my family, then we came to Estonia in the beginning of the 60s. We came from Russia to Estonia. My grandfather came. But in this sense we are still Estonian. […] My grandfather still has this sort of a Russian soul. He still reads the Russian-language newspaper. Well, he speaks nice Estonian. But […] it's very complicated to talk to grandfather about these issues. He says that he cannot understand why they did that, why they had to remove [the Bronze Soldier]. That the Russians didn't mean anything bad. So it's funny that in my own family this [is happening]. I am more like against these things. It doesn't sit well with me that … well the Russians should learn Estonian in school and … why are they even living here then. But well, I don't know, maybe I'm half racist or something (she laughs)." (Siret, 22, Southern Estonia).

The theme of language appeared to still have a significant place in the integration issues, which in this context could have been heightened due to discussing a controversial and emotional issue such as the conflicting history narratives through the Bronze soldier incident. Especially since, as demonstrated below, the more pragmatic elements of economic necessity have become another key dimension in perceptions of integration. However, the continued emphasis on language demonstrates that the holistic process put forward by the current integration programme was yet to receive in depth reflection by the Estonian-speaking respondents in 2013. Russian-speaking respondents appeared to have accepted this understanding in 'temperament' or 'soul', and one Russian-speaking respondent referred to the perceived differences by saying:

> "I see all of them as the same – both Russians and Estonians. It's the mentality that is obviously different. The Estonians are quieter." (Aleksey, 52, Tallinn).

As stated the Russian-speaking respondents were in general less inclined to discuss the relocation of the Bronze Soldier monument with me. It appeared that they might have not felt comfortable sharing their opinions because of their perception

of Estonians' understanding of the matter. However, a woman interviewed in Tallinn from a mixed background (Russian-Estonian) provided a more complex approach to the relocation and the aftermath of it.

> "I think that they, how to say, rushed a bit with the Bronze Soldier. Didn't take the Russians' feelings into account. I've told them that 'you're rioting because we took the dead people from the trolleybus stop to the cemetery where they belong. Where they can rest in peace.' At the same time in Russia there was this news that also some military pilots were buried and they simply pulled down the monument and made it into a parking lot. They weren't relocated anywhere. Nobody talks about that. But… with Russians you can't… they sort of won't take it as the truth. They ask about why this [the Bronze Soldier relocating] was done. If someone had told them, then this 9th of May would have stopped. 'We know that it is being removed, no problems (*viige rahulikult*)'. There would have not been any riot. But I think that it was a good excuse to simply create some anxiety to the other side and see what comes from it." (Anna, 65, Tallinn).

Even though the quote above demonstrates how she tried to negotiate between the so-called two sides of the incident, she also used the same Orientalising practices to justify her perception of the situation.

> "There is no point fighting over monuments. If you, the state (*riik*) thinks that it is not in the right place, let's take it to where the right place is. Why do we have to be like the Russians – came here and destroyed all our monuments?" (Anna, 65, Tallinn).

The third aspect that can be brought forward from here is the more instrumental education system, which was seen as key to integration in terms of contributing to Estonian language skills and understanding Estonian/European perspectives.

> "[The problem lies in] the Russian schools. Mostly this refers to Tallinn or that Ida-Virumaa because everywhere else it has taken the natural path – the Russian schools simply wither away because Russians put their children in Estonian schools. […] I think that there have been political reasons behind it, why at one point or another ahead of the elections they've wanted to get more votes from the opposing camp. […] It has now taken 22 years since re-independence and we are still talking about making secondary school 60% Estonian based, but this has been excessively prolonged (*pika vinnaga*)." (Mart, 50, Brussels).

The topic of education was relevant in most interviews and especially so when talking about the Bronze Soldier incident. Here, a contributing factor can be seen to lie in education also being a source of self-esteem and pride for Estonia. The

biannual international PISA[13] tests demonstrate that Estonian schoolchildren rank among the top developed countries in the world while being at the absolute top in Europe. The emphasis on smart-products and IT-development, the adaptability of the people and again, the quick economic growth that Estonia has had can be seen to bring out the complex source for self-esteem which alongside the perceived 'natural' traits of Estonians as hard-working and resilient provide a backdrop for placing the rioting and looting people during the Bronze Night into a completely different, incomprehensible 'underclass'.

> "Let's say that I don't have personal experience, but when I read a couple of days ago now how some Estonian and Russian gangs got into a fight (*omavahel kokku läksid*) in Tartu, then I suppose there are plenty of problems. And this probably has to do with the level of education. Who from an educated family and themselves educated [would do that?]. I think this is the same for an Estonian (she laughs)." (Signe, 70, Muhu island).

The rioting and looting were seen from within the Orientalising framework discussed in the previous chapter as something that would be undertaken only by the uncivilised and uneducated or in a word the 'abnormal' Russian-speakers, therefore removing it from the sphere of any meaningful identity debate and wider societal problems with integration in the Estonian society. The Estonian respondents seemed to attribute the Bronze Soldier riots to external forces and the actions of some kind of 'uneducated' underclass who have nothing in common with the vast majority of 'loyal' and law-abiding Russians. As one respondent stated:

> "It was more a brawl of these underclass people (*madalate inimeste*). Breaking, stealing and carrying… An educated and smart Russian did not partake, I think." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

The quote above refers to a redefinition of the boundaries between 'normal' and 'abnormal' against the background of the economic changes of the 1990s. It was not the ethnic division in itself that provided a dividing line in the society, but rather the perceptions of 'normal' educated, law-abiding people versus the so-called underclass who allow themselves to be manipulated into destructive action

[13]PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an international survey conducted on the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) initiative which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. Students from randomly selected schools take tests in functional reading, mathematics and science.

by the Russian state as discussed in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.2.4 for detailed discussion on 'sphere of influence').

Education was a topic that was frequently referred to in the mainly Russian-speaking town of Narva as well, although in a different context. At the time there had been significant controversy surrounding the transition from Russian language schools to schools where at least 60% of the language of tuition is Estonian. This has been especially problematic in Ida-Virumaa including Narva, where most of the population is Russian-speaking (over 85% in Narva, the third largest city in Estonia).

Analysing the data from the interviews in Narva, there appeared little resistance to the perceived social expectation to learn the Estonian language. The responses could have been influenced by the fact that they were giving the interview to an Estonian-speaker and therefore were providing answers according to how they understood that an Estonian-speaker might expect them to. However, while keeping this in mind, some interesting elements emerged from these interviews that have to be highlighted in the context of education.

However positive the respondents appeared regarding the necessity (economic, societal) to learn the Estonian language, an issue that was highlighted in regard to Estonian-language training in schools was the lower level of general education that pupils in Narva would be receiving as a result of not having suitable Estonian language skills prior to that. A recent school graduate, a 20-year-old Russian-speaking woman from Narva, laughed that she was able to study some of the subjects in Estonian, but was not able to learn history for example in Estonian. Here it is interesting to note that the Estonian perspective of 'educating' the Russian-speakers to fit 'our values' is seen to have a reverse effect in terms of the level of education received – a difference in perceptions of 'normality' in this regard. Another respondent in Narva stated that:

> "In Narva, the situation is like that, that when you have two Russian parents, it is easier for the child to study in Russian. Because the [Estonian] programme is difficult for children. Like myself – I have two children both in a Russian secondary school. From the other side, for them to have conversational Estonian… it's called 'immersion' (*погружение; kümblus*). They speak Estonian from the first grade. They simply speak it. But the

> level of education is lower like that I think. I can make a few comparisons and Russian children get a lower level of education in Estonian. Because of this I think that there has to be a Russian secondary school, where they could together learn Estonian, and English obviously." (Nadya, Narva).

Some of the problems highlighted by respondents in Narva included limited opportunities for practising the language and the cost of the language courses if one wanted to learn on one's own. Estonian courses are subsidised from the state budget only for people applying for Estonian citizenship and for the ones Language Inspection has qualified for language testing.

As briefly mentioned earlier, the controversial issues surrounding the Language and Citizenship Laws in Estonia were not brought up by either the Estonian- or Russian-speaking respondents. The issue of citizens and non-citizens can be seen to have been relieved with the changes introduced to the Citizenship Law in 1998. However, this also indicates that the crux of the issue was never about citizenship per se, even though this dominated all official discussions of the issue during the 1990s and in EU accession – it has always been more about knowledge of Estonian and a person's attitude to the state.

7.3 ECONOMIC ASPECTS

When discussing interethnic relations in Estonia, one of the core angles from which the Estonian-speaking respondents discussed relations with Russophones was in pragmatic economic terms. The economic recession, fatigue from austerity measures and political disappointment was perceived as having no dividing lines in this regard and therefore the 'us' and 'them' narrative did not appear within this context among the ethnic groups, as discussed already above as well in terms of references to an 'underclass', indicating that tensions brought on by the Bronze Soldier events were quickly overshadowed by the common experience of economic recession.

> "I think that the problem is the same for the people living here. Life is getting poorer, prices are going up. In reality this old politics and history isn't really discussed here too much. The main thing for a person currently is that life would start getting better and not worse. […] The rest of it has

> been left in the background. Should some sort of a hassle start between some countries and the topic gets brought up, then the differences might start coming up again, but in general I believe that plenty of the non-Estonians here in Estonia consider Estonia their home." (Priit, 49, Tallinn).

The nature of the perceived improved relations was often framed through the economic prism which is compatible with the wider construction of Estonian identity – reconciling the neoliberal economic paradigm with the esteem of not accepting contrasting interpretations of history (by Russia) or perceptions of Russia (by the 'West'). One could argue that a good integration tactic could be to find a new, uniting Other for common identity-construction. While the period of economic growth in the 2000s provided a basis for this construction in terms of moving forward to a prosperous European future that everyone would benefit from, then the recent economic crisis and the general lack of economic growth have offered a solid common ground for that again from another perspective. For both the Estonian and Russian-speakers most of everyday life aspects were seen through the economic prism.

The standard of living and average wage were constantly brought up when discussing various aspects of life in Estonia and were seen as a crucial element separating Estonia from the Western European states. Within the respondents' understanding of what 'Europe' entails, Estonia was seen as lacking the economic prosperity they envisioned there, although it was seen to uphold the economic values associated with belonging to the 'West' better than the 'others' (see Chapter 5). In other words, the 'West' was seen as ahead of Estonia economically because of the freedoms it had enjoyed during the decades after the war but was also viewed to be in danger of stagnating if it does not follow independent Estonia's example in the face of the challenges arising from globalisation. Within the discussion surrounding perceptions of EU and Europe in this context, the Western European states were framed according to the perceived higher standard of living (even if not always accurately) and provided the Other in terms of unifying the different ethnicities.

As one respondent from a mixed-family background said:

> "I think this comes from our overall poverty. The people are, in fact, still poor. It's not normal that a person goes to the shop and looks for discounted

> products. It isn't normal. We don't see these kinds of stacks of discounted [products] anywhere else in the world. [Discounted] because the deadline is passing." (Anna, 65, Tallinn).

With the reference to what 'isn't normal', the continued existence of a boundary between perceptions of the Estonian Self and the Western Other can be seen. As discussed previously the notion that the Western model is not sustainable and that Estonia followed the 'correct' path in response to the economic crisis is there within the discourse as a statement of self-esteem designed to legitimise the current social and economic order.

However, one needs to keep in mind that the economic aspect is simply one perspective in a complex web of interethnic constructions in Estonia, which nevertheless deserves to be explored in more detail in an attempt to acquire a more adequate understanding of how people (re)construct identity narratives on an everyday level. Since the fieldwork for this research was conducted in the aftermath of the economic crisis (in 2013), it is hardly surprising that the respondents saw this aspect as most relevant in their daily lives. This perspective is also encouraged by the inward and outward labelling of Estonia as an economic success prior to the economic crisis and becoming the poster-boy for the EU for implementing austerity measures during the crisis (see Chapter 5).

In accordance with the general acceptance of neoliberal market economy, the idea of consumerism was highlighted by the respondents and seen as superseding nationalist tendencies in the post-EU context. A consumer has been elevated onto a high platform and this corresponds to the idea of belonging to the 'Western' capitalist world – the understanding of what the 'West' means in itself.

> "[The Russian-speakers] are consumers. They are relevant in the economic sense. It took us years to figure that out. […] That was the case during re-independence era – that Estonian is the national language and please speak Estonian. It's become more pragmatic now – if you own a company and you want the client, well the income, the client's money, you have to [be]. Even if you have that pride or are fundamentally nationalistic, you will just have to swallow that." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

As can be seen in the quote above, the reconciliation between the pragmatic understanding of economic necessity and the more national emotional element is still relevant a decade since joining the Western structures. However, as also

discussed in Chapter 6, national self-esteem has been shifted more towards economic success and therefore 'swallowing' the nationalist feelings in light of this does not in fact undermine national pride, but rather demonstrates the moral high ground taken by Estonia (for this Estonian-speaker).

The differences in economic equality in terms of access and progress in the job market received a more varied approach. Several discourses can be extracted from this perspective according to regional (urban-rural) as well as within different urban settings (Tallinn-Narva).

From the urban perspective, relating mostly to the respondents from Tallinn, several respondents highlighted the increasing possibilities of Russian-speakers in the job market. This could possibly be interpreted as a way to put a positive spin on the integration process through the pragmatic economic framework, and therefore reinforce the understanding that it simply makes economic sense to learn languages. The same is occasionally said about Estonian-speakers – that if possible, they should still learn Russian as Russia is a neighbour and knowing several languages is both economically beneficial (Russia as a trade partner etc.) and also culturally more enlightening. This is a relatively new phenomenon as the emphasis in the 1990s had been on learning English and attracting Western tourists, the importance of learning Russian for pragmatic reasons had surfaced again leaving the more national emotional issues to the background. However, this could only come from an Estonian-speaker in Estonia – the Russian-speakers remained relatively modest about their language skills.

> "Well, let's put it like that – my daughter's friend is a human resources manager at a [name] hotel and she says that she doesn't want to hire Estonians any longer. [She says] 'I have people coming from Ida-Viru[maa] - they have decent Estonian, decent Russian and decent English. […] I can't [hire them any longer because] they are not competitive in hotels.'" (Anna, 65, Tallinn).

> "Just this morning they (radio) were saying that the Russian youth is taking over the Estonian job market. That the Russian student learns English, learns Estonian and knows Russian and has three languages. But the Estonian student learns English but doesn't learn and doesn't want to learn Russian. And so there are lots of young Russians on the job market getting better positions." (Leeni, 73, Tallinn).

This approach was not however shared by the Russian-speaking respondents in Narva or Tallinn. On the contrary, the Russian-speaking respondents discussed the issues surrounding the job market in relatively negative terms, placing emphasis on the disparity between Estonian- and Russian-speakers in hiring practices (i.e. that Estonian language is required) or opportunities for getting a relatively well-paid position.

> "And not only in Narva do we have unemployment. Unemployment is everywhere. There are simply places with more of it and less of it. This is what I know for sure. People want to work, but ... Many are made redundant, people are fired. That's why, for example, they go, for example, so they wouldn't lose their jobs, they take Estonian language courses. To know Estonian at a level where they could keep their jobs. Or, for example, they learn Estonian to increase their salaries." (Nadya, Narva).

Even if certain differences are highlighted in terms of language issues in the job market, in the context of the economic crisis, everyone was still seen as being in the same 'boat', supporting the view that economic concerns have (to a significant degree) managed to trump questions of ethnicity. The economic woes were seen to cut across the country and affect people of all ethnicity and age. One of the more acute divisions in terms of perceived economic differences was rather urban-rural than interethnic.

A respondent in Narva highlighted the desolate situation in the border town in the aftermath of the economic crisis. The problem of depopulation through emigration from Narva to the larger cities in Estonia (or abroad) was especially critical for her (as can be seen from the exaggerated numbers).

> "People have low level of education. Most people have only general education. […] People get made redundant and they turn to drinking alcohol. […] Everyone who can, will leave. […] The population has decreased significantly. If about 5% of people leave Estonia annually, then in Ida-Virumaa that number is 20%. It is big. Nobody will come here. The thing is that people go to Tartu and Tallinn, from Narva as well. But nobody comes to Narva. We should exchange [remove] the state and local authorities. This is not how they should behave. Everybody knows that they steal. […] Everything has been proven, and they still sit here and govern the town! First thing is that they all should be exchanged." (Yulia, Narva).

The economic inequality perceived by people in the countryside also highlight the more difficult situation in peripheral areas compared to the better-off urban ones

(meaning mostly Tallinn and Tartu). As one respondent from rural Estonia, near the Russian border, spoke about the expectations she has for the economy from the everyday perspective:

> "To take the system of these [public institutions]. Why does the director of a rural [institution] have to earn two times less than the director of the same [institution] in the city? I think that to survive in this periphery… and we are actually on the same level with the best in Estonia. But not in terms of pay. I don't know why it has to be like that – it isn't normal. […] At the same time I'm sad that the salaries are so low in the Estonian state. As I love to say, the janitor should be able to feed and school their family and live off [their salary]. Not to mention when you're a specialist – then I should be able to allow myself a lot more than I can now. It's become especially sad in recent times. If I was young, I would leave as well because I only have one life and I want to allow myself… I have been working really hard for it all my life. In the old times people went to the Leningrad market (including her). I've been a cultural worker, but the pay was so modest that… I'm on a stage in front of people, I need party clothes for that, I can't have sweats (*dressikad*) or work clothes on, which would be easier and cheaper. […] To have a second work day after [finishing] your main job was not easy. I've picked mushrooms, berries, done needlepoint and so on and so on. When the time came for establishing your own companies, then we had a three-family-company and then [you worked] from early morning till late at night, from morning to morning during Christmas holidays. So in one word, we should be able to live a normal life with eight hours [of work]. I feel sorry for the young families. I'm talking about big families. We could have more children but the current system just doesn't favour it." (Laila, 55, Setomaa).

In this sense, Estonia was seen as not having reached the expected goals and what are perceived as Western criteria for people's welfare, not reached the 'normality' envisioned in these terms for Estonia. There appears to be an idealistic view of the achievable standards of living. Even though she talks about the shortcomings of 'the current system', this refers more to the disappointment with the state political elite and the lack of investment in the rural areas rather than the overall free market economy.

However difficult the economic circumstances were envisioned, the general neoliberal market-economy approach was not questioned or criticised by any respondent. The problems were seen not as deriving from the generally accepted 'commonsense' market economy principles per se, but from the lack of restraint some other countries were demonstrating in not adhering to the austerity measures (see Chapter 5) (therefore contributing to the overall economic crisis),

and the decline in the standards of integrity by the local political elite compared to the 1990s.

7.3.1 ENTERING THE EURO ZONE

Also, adding to the more practical and economic line of thought, even though the Euro was introduced in Estonia only in 2011, it is seen as an identifying part of being in the EU, and the most relevant part for the 'common person' of belonging to the Union. There are three main associations with the Euro that run through interviews. First, on an everyday level almost all respondents mentioned how the introduction of Euro drove the prices a lot higher in Estonia.

> "But… well there was this thing that… it was more like a campaign that "Euro won't increase the prices!" and what not. And to think about it like that, then yes, the introduction of Euro and Euro in itself didn't change anything, but well, we saw, right, how much more expensive life became all of a sudden. And we were already warned about this by the smart Finns, who had gone through it." (Merike, 49, Muhu island).

The second aspect was from the pragmatic line of thought seeing changing the currency as a necessity or a logical step for deeper integration into Europe. The practicalities of having a common currency while travelling were highlighted, however, this has little effect on a lot of Estonians due to limited resources. Giving up the Estonian Kroon was seen in terms of a necessary sacrifice for securing Estonia's financial position in the West and losing a piece of its identity along the way.

> "I absolutely felt sorry. It was a beautiful currency. And our own money still. And we wanted it so so badly and of course I feel sorry. But I'm also happy with the introduction of Euro, but certainly sorry for the Estonian money. At the same time, as such a small currency, I suppose it would've been difficult for it to last." (Laila, 55, Setomaa).

Third, certain nostalgia for the Estonian Kroon was certainly detectable when the respondents, especially within the older generation, discussed giving up the Kroon. It was referred to as the identity of a country, although as said above, not all agreed and some respondents thought of it as simply necessary means with one

quoting: 'I would rather read (*loen*) books than count (*loen*) money' (Greta, 52, Tallinn).

> "Well we could have kept the Estonian money. […] I don't understand why. We are European Union – fine. Everything is common – I can understand that. But every country could have kept their own identity. That money, it was somehow Estonian, it felt good. But now it's sort of generic. Well of course it's easier to travel, but [kroon] should have stayed." (Linda, 34, Tallinn).

> "I felt really sorry to lose the Kroon. They were such cute bills. [They] honestly were, beautiful also. And I knew that everything would get more expensive with the Euro." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

The discussion surrounding the Kroon indicates a certain tension between the 'spatial' and 'temporal' narratives of 'normality'. The negotiation between how the new 'spatial' normality - everything that goes with belonging to the EU (e.g. Euro) – fits with the new 'temporal' narrative of the glorification of the 1990s (e.g. Kroon as a 'beautiful currency'), provides a good backdrop for understanding the complexity of people's perceptions of 'normality'.

The neoliberal capitalist understanding for individual responsibility for any success/failure in the economic system also came through in the interviews. This perception did not only lie in learning the Estonian language as an instrument for possible economic success, but also more generally in perceptions of society in Estonia.

> "The gap between the rich and poor is big. But at the same time, I'm not arguing against the fact that unfortunately the so-called poor create that situation somewhat themselves, where they are poor. That they don't use money sensibly. Like for example the SMS-loans. […] One thing is that a person can't get out of it when they've foolishly taken the loan, but another thing is that they were foolish enough to take out the loan at all." (Raul, 22, Tallinn).

7.3.2 FINDING ESTONIA'S NOKIA

Another aspect that deserves discussion here is how Estonia has made attempts to brand itself through the economic prism. Ever since Lennart Meri put forward the

idea of finding an *Estonian Nokia* in 1999[14], this has every now and then resurfaced in Estonia. Various things have been discussed as the different possibilities for an Estonian *Nokia*, which could be anything from an idea to an object which would drive Estonia forward economically and distinguish it in the international arena. This *Nokia* was seen as part of becoming a 'normal' competitive state in a globalised economy. The interview data revealed that this idea of finding something 'truly' Estonian that would distance it from the Soviet past and also differentiate it within the European space appeared to be something still sought after.

> Me: "What could Estonia promote itself with?"
> Tarmo: "Are you asking me what the Estonian Nokia is?" (27, Tallinn).

The reference to *Nokia*, a highly successful Finnish brand in the 1990s, Estonia's own understanding of branding was tied to this prosperous, innovative and technologically advanced ideal, which also forms a part of Estonia's Nordic discourse discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 5. The key theme emerging from the discussion of 'branding' Estonia was expectedly the IT dimension, as this has been the niche painting the picture of Estonia as a small but innovative, adaptive and even courageous country in line with the slogans of 'the little country that could' and 'shining star' put forward during the 1990s. This image has been largely cultivated externally but appears to have been 'successfully' assimilated by the wider public in the sense that it is accepted and appreciated by the people on the ground. The interview data also revealed the image of an E-stonia as the most effective factor for introducing Estonia to the world. However, these statements also indicate that people appear to have uncritically assimilated the whole IT dimension as part of the dominant neoliberal orthodoxy. The IT aspect along with other but related nation-branding elements were referred to by respondents of various backgrounds, ages and genders demonstrating how deeply this dimension has been internalised in Estonia.

> "For example I think that the E-stonia is really cool (*kihvt*). Kind of brings forward our essence!" (Eveli, 48, Brussels)

[14] President's speech at Hansapank Economic Conference on May 5, 1999 (https://vp1992-2001.president.ee/est/k6ned/K6ne.asp?ID=3915, accessed 22/06/2017)

> "I think this E-state is a nice indicator I'd say. What else do we have… Well, a lot of good people have gone abroad and showed us and introduced us." (Aino, 77, Tallinn).

> "Well, it's a country with specialists and developed IT landscape and good economic environment. I think these are the ones." (Tarmo, 27, Tallinn).

> "And as I've understood, we're kind of a E-state as well. All the elections and stuff take place over the internet and different technologies are quite advanced. The EST CUBE thing for example. This kind of a technical side." (Siret, 22, Southern Estonia).

> "Well we promote and talk about how Skype comes from Estonia. That's much better (*kõvem sõna*) than Welcome to Estonia." (Mart, 50, Brussels).

The last quote refers to the brand logo Welcome to Estonia, which was used during the interview process to spark discussion on nation-branding in general. Nation-branding can be seen as directly connected to how the nation is *imagined*. It is constrained by this image and constructs it at the same time. The Brand Estonia project was commissioned in 2001 prior to Estonia's accession to the EU to introduce Estonia to the world. The logo was accompanied by the slogan 'Positively transforming' to demonstrate Estonia's move towards to West and highlight the relatively successful transition period and away from the East and past (Jordan 2011: 85). However, as expected and shown in previous research (Jordan 2011), the negative attitudes towards the campaign surfaced clearly from the interview data.

> "Oh, I don't want to talk about it. I'd rather not discuss it. Unfortunately, in a word, I'm not a supporter of it. It was a true waste of money." (Greta, 52, Tallinn).

> "Estonia, the Old Town. […] This would be much better than any English text (referring to the Welcome to Estonia logo). I don't understand it. Now it's become familiar and it's everywhere and you're used to it. But it doesn't say anything about Estonia. There's nothing. Only that EST. In capital letters, that's the only thing you look at that this is characteristic of Estonia." (Linda, 34, Tallinn).

After nearly a decade of belonging to the EU and being part of other international organisations, there were indications from the interview data that the *Estonian Nokia* is yet to be discovered and perhaps it hadn't fully yet become 'another boring' (as Toomas Hendrik Ilves referred to Estonia hopefully 'becoming another

boring Nordic country' already in the 90s) European country and was still searching for its *je ne sais quoi* to be recognised for in the wider world. This aspiration for becoming a 'boring' country can be seen as a byword for the 'normality', when counterpoised to Estonia's turbulent past and historical sense of geopolitical vulnerability.

> "I think that we have darn (*kuradi*) little in this area. In promoting Estonia… What do people know. They know that – an IT republic, right? Perhaps also the Singing Festival, but that's more… There aren't that many things to be proud of. Well Skype, but that's gone now as well." (Greta, 52, Tallinn).

Nation-branding in itself can be seen as symptomatic of the neoliberal paradigm and globalisation, with the territorial state being reconceptualised as the competition state and the normative criteria of international subjectivity can be seen as changing (Browning 2015: 283). Browning explains that when a world is characterised in terms of global market competition, the entrepreneurial capacity, openness to trade and investment, and flexibility become the legitimising force for a country through which self-esteem is gained (2015: 283). This affects the national narratives states tell about themselves and the emphasis of nation branding programmes is increasingly on rejecting the traditional focus on nationalism and kinship ties in favour of presenting societies as cosmopolitan, multicultural spaces open for investment (Browning 2015: 283). While Browning's take can certainly be seen in the Estonian case, these attempts at branding Estonia were not seen to have been successful, as on the one hand the respondents expressed concern that Estonia was not known in the world which also indicated that the historical experience was not recognised at times even on the European level.

> "It's so sad to listen to when someone in, I don't know, Southern Europe doesn't know anything about Estonia. It's simply horrible. I'm not even going to talk about that America. But the fact that in Europe [people don't know], that shows that people [generally] don't know. […] That's more in Southern Europe, Northern Europe and Central Europe, I hope, [know what Estonia is]." (Greta, 52, Tallinn).

> "I think they know us already in the European Union, but I don't know, you look at some of the travel shows on TV from America or some place and they [don't know] Estonia. We should get to the point where everybody knows us." (Piret, 37, Tallinn).

And on the other hand, however, they also struggled in coming up with anything to promote about Estonia.

> "I think it's the nature. I don't think we have anything else to offer which wouldn't exist anywhere else (she laughs)." (Katrin, 32, Tallinn).

7.4 NATURE OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

As discussed in Chapter 1, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the main goals for Estonia was to gain membership in the European Union and NATO. The conditionality of accession to various international organisations became a benchmark for officially becoming a consolidated democracy with reliable, accountable and responsive institutions and meaningful participation in the political process – a 'normal' Western country in a sense. The following section looks at how the respondents discussed politics and politicians after having lived nearly a decade in this achieved 'normality'.

7.4.1 GLORIFICATION OF THE 1990s

The era of re-independence in the 1990s is glorified and there seems to be a level of disappointment with the present-day politics of Estonia. A certain disillusionment with politicians and politics in general surfaced in the interviews. Even though there is little surprising about people's disengagement from the political scene and disappointment with politicians in the Western world in general, having only gained independence in 1991, this fatigue with the political establishment has come about relatively quickly for Estonia. In a negative sense this falls into the category of being a small and flexible country able to rapidly implement the Western ways. However, this disillusionment with politics has a few particular elements given the context in Estonia.

While the narrative of state restoration and glorification of the first period of independence have been emphasised in previous studies focussing on Estonian

identity, these themes rarely appeared in the interviews, and as was also discussed in Chapter 5, belonging to the EU has brought about the idea of a 'Second Estonian Republic', which had become a more tangible point of reference for the respondents within the new 'normality' of belonging to the Western World.

The beginning of the 1990s can be seen to symbolise an idealistic virtuous era, when few benefits were offered to politicians in return for the possibility of rebuilding a state repressed under the Soviet rule for 50 years apart from national pride and working towards a common goal. Put simply, 'times were hard, but we were all in it together'. A nostalgia for the perceived solidarity of the 90s, that had given way to individualism, consumerism and atomisation. This longing for more zeal-based politics reflects more the ideal rather than the ambition for actually altering the more general neoliberal direction. The photos of the three Estonian presidents appeared to provide a good basis for the respondents to reflect on the re-independence era and the changes they perceived on the political level. As one respondent remarked:

> "These portrait pictures are like Estonian history for me. The history of independent Estonia." (Eveli, 48, Brussels).

When discussing the political situation in Estonia and various politicians, the 1990s were constantly brought up by the respondents in a romanticised manner and Lennart Meri, the first president of the newly re-established state (in office 1992-2001), was referred to as a 'great man'.

> "Well he was a brilliant personality. Very unique. And to think about him as the president, then he was certainly the best (*ainuõige*) choice at the time, because he was the one who managed to attract attention for Estonia and bring us onto the European map better. A nice, wonderful person. I didn't know him personally, but well, he was intellectually very capable with a broad horizon, knew the languages. Well, everything there should be. And occasionally stubborn, which is also necessary." (Tiina, 37, Brussels).

> "Lennart Meri, the first president. Truth be told, I was young then still. But life was better before, I think. From 1991 to 2000. The economic situation was calmer before." (Dimitry, 27, Narva).

Besides Meri, the other presidents got a relatively lukewarm reception among the respondents who highlighted their function as a figurehead. The political career

of President Arnold Rüütel (in office 2001-2006) received less attention, but he was credited for being a 'ladies' favourite' and having a wonderful 'head of hair' (Greta, 52, Tallinn; Leeni, 73, Tallinn). Even though Rüütel had a comparable role to Meri in the restoration of independence, he was tarnished by his Communist Party past in a way that Meri was not. Opinions on president Toomas Hendrik Ilves (in office 2006-2016) varied, as some saw him as a perfect representative with his foreign policy experience and good language skills, while others viewed him as still a foreigner born abroad and questioned his Estonian language abilities.

> "Well let's just say that comrade (*товарищ*) Ilves came from nowhere." (Toomas, 39, Tallinn).

> "Ilves-Ilves, I'd like to say that Ilves is continuing what Lennart Meri started. That Lennart Meri brought Estonia to the European map and Ilves is sort of continuing that. Which I really like." (Tarmo, 27, Tallinn).

> "He wants to do Estonian things, but from the start he's been very foreign, since he didn't speak Estonian very well. He spoke it, but very roughly (*konarlikult*). He already made some mistakes in his speeches – the president's language should be perfect!" (Kaili, 70, Central Estonia).

Politics and politicians were generally perceived as having lost the 'right' way with the measured pragmatic mode (although consistent with the neoliberal agenda guiding various other approaches) substituting the national emotional path for politics. The differences in perceptions of the presidents can be attributed to this to a degree.

> "Things have changed for sure. I think that in the beginning of the 1990s, this [politics] was done with this great … zeal (*õhin*) or perhaps with this… I don't know the best word for it – patriotism isn't perhaps the right word, but well… Present-day politics is much more calculated (*kaalutletud*)." (Mart, 50, Brussels).

Several reasons can be cited here as possible causes for the shift in the direction of discontent and partly this was already discussed in Chapter 5 regarding Estonia's positioning in the EU. The economic success Estonia had in the beginning of 2000s was seen as an outcome of the shock therapy and having gone through the painful transition period in the 1990s. Fulfilling the criteria and gaining access to the European institutions were supposed to provide a solid basis for further advancement. The expectations had been high for the rise of living standards in

the years following EU accession in 2004. As mentioned in the previous chapter the Reform Party slogan about taking Estonia into the five top richest countries in Europe as part of their 2007 election campaign illustrates these expectations (even if exaggerated at the time), but received ridicule both in the media and by the people in light of the disappointment with the economic situation in Estonia, which started to deteriorate already at the end of 2007 as pointed out in the introduction. The year 2009, when the financial crisis, which hit Estonia relatively hard, brought about a different reality in Estonia. The recovery from the economic crisis has been slower than expected in Estonia and has left an imprint how people frame the political scene both domestically and on the EU level (see Chapter 5 for discussion on Greece).

Even though the established narrative of 'returning to Europe' suggests that Estonia was always part of Europe, having been in the role of 'catching up' politically, economically and socially to the rest of the Western world, was part of the perception. Having formally achieved the 'normality' of belonging to the Western world through EU and NATO accession, however, appeared to mean accepting joint responsibility in the EU economically (see Chapter 5 for discussion on Greece) and the exhaustion of these political ideals to an extent.

7.4.2 DISTANCING IN THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL SPHERE

The discussion regarding the Estonian presidents usually led to wider discussion on Estonia's present-day politics, where it was apparent, that a general disappointment with the political actors in Estonia had taken root. Quite a few Estonian-speaking respondents accentuated the growing distance between the politicians and the 'regular person'.

> "I've been supporting Reform Party all this time, I still think that their politics is not for the most common person. It's more for the people who live better – they represent their interests most with their politics. […] Their politics has taken Estonia forward on the world stage and a lot of people have gone for that [and voted for them]. But I don't know, with the elections coming up, I don't know… I think they'll be getting fewer votes this time. The circle of people I know (*tutvusringkonda*), I think a lot of them are thinking like that. Myself included, when the new elections come,

> I don't know who I'm going to vote for. I don't want to vote for one, the other, third or fourth [party]. In a word, whether I'm going to go to vote – that's not right either – but currently my head is so empty that I don't know who to vote for. […] I think that the parliament also – they have a good salary. When you look at some of their sessions, the seats are empty. At the same time they tell you that they don't rest, that they only work-work-work. […] Well, I don't know, they don't appear to be working 24 hours a day, but they want a big salary and then things are good. […] So I don't think that things are fine with that." (Priit, 49, Tallinn).

The distancing from the wider political sphere carried on to the key political figures at the time. The respondents were provided images of the two main political leaders in Estonia at the time: Prime Minister Andrus Ansip and the leader of the opposition party – the Centre Party – Edgar Savisaar.

Opinions varied about Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, who is seen as a firm leader but also as having grown distant from the people. For example, the long-time prime minister was described in the following terms:

> "Well, Ansip was fine (*okei*) at first but now he's completely lost it. Totally, I think." (Linda, 34, Tallinn).

> "He seems a bit too dictatorish and that frightens me." (Laila, 55, Setomaa).

However, respondents were also concerned that there is too much criticism pointed towards him and he was credited for making tough decision during the crisis. As discussed also in the methods chapter, the Russian-speaking respondents, especially in Narva, were somewhat reluctant to discuss politics and refrained from discussing the Prime Minister. In one interview, a respondent even clearly stopped herself from saying anything concrete about him:

> "Here, in Narva, we have a lot of negative about Andrus Ansip... a lot of negative information about him, about politics. […] As a person - I do not know. But as a politician ... A lot of people are dissatisfied with his policies." When asked about her own opinion on this, she struggled, "I ... it's hard for me to say, as for ...ehm… I'm not very interested in politics, so I cannot say what's right, what's wrong." (Nadya, Narva).

During the Bronze Soldier crisis Ansip became a polarising figure. His personal ratings and those of his party, the Reform Party, soared among Estonians (45% in

May 2007[15]), but he attracted opprobrium from Russians. In 2013, the highest rating for the Reform Party was 25% in March-April and lowest 18% in November-December. Even though the ratings were unusually high for the party in power in 2007, one could interpret the fact that Estonians were quick to round on him (and his broken election promises) after the economic crisis as an indication that people's minds were first and foremost on the economy rather than 'national' themes.

The opposition leader and mayor of Tallinn, Edgar Savisaar, was widely disliked within the Estonian-speaking community, and while receiving some credit for his actions during the 1990s, he was viewed as a 'sell-out' for Estonians and as one respondent put it 'drawing on votes from the opposing side'.

> "I feel like [Savisaar] is kind of trying to hinder our European topic." (Piret, 37, Tallinn).

> "To me, Savisaar, appears to be a bit more Russian-minded person." (Siret, 22, Southern Estonia).

On the other hand, and not surprisingly, Savisaar, who has been appealing to the Russian-speaking vote for a long time, was viewed favourably by the respondents in Narva.

> "This is the mayor of Tallinn - Savisaar is a good person, and as a politician has done much more for Estonia than some of the more influential politicians that I see here." (Dmitry, 27, Narva).

The reluctance for people to discuss politics in Narva can also (in addition to the methodological issues discussed) be attributed to little engagement with the political sphere both as living in a more peripheral city in Estonia and perhaps on a more personal level as well. A respondent in Narva brought out an interesting perspective regarding Narva as a 'forgotten' town in terms of state politics.

> "In Narva, I think that we have been forgotten (she laughs) in Estonia, [forgotten] that we are here at all. I don't know. Narva rarely takes part in any of this [politics], that things pass the way they do and it is always on the sidelines a bit. That is why, in principle, we are not always that informed. […] In general I think that more should be done for the people

[15] Kantar Emor Party support ratings in Estonia: http://www.emor.ee/erakondade-toetus/ accessed 29.05.2017

> and not for themselves. It seems to me that our politicians, democracy and so on – they are always out for themselves." (Nina, 20, Narva).

This statement falls in line with Smith and Burch (2012) claims regarding Narva as having a particular niche identity of its own, which doesn't seem to fit into Estonia, but not belonging to anywhere else either.

The disappointment with politics and current state of affairs can also be seen in other rural areas, where a respondent brought out the lack of enthusiasm for participating in the political sphere. People living in more rural areas tended to discuss politics more in terms of local politics rather than the state level.

> "I wish there was some change at least. That the people in front could be changed or exchanged. Well on the local level here […] the faces have been basically the same for 20 years. […] We had a group of people here – an electoral alliance (he was part of it). We had this enthusiasm for doing things. It's only been four years. And I think that we took on some good things, [we had] good thoughts and plans about what to do. And now when we look at the whole thing – there were almost 20 people in this alliance and 4 got elected to the municipal council – we sat down one day and looked at whether and what we could do with the local life [for the coming elections]. And [the enthusiasm] has disappeared for some reason. Everyone is disappointed somehow. I don't know whether disappointed or jaded – I don't know what it is." (Martin, 69, Setomaa).

7.5 CONCLUSION

As the chapter demonstrates there still appeared to be a generalised understanding that Estonia should be consolidated as a nation-state instead of any multi-national civic society and that the Russian-speaking population should 'integrate' according to the terms set by the majority, core nation. The interview data also suggested that limited emphasis was placed upon the formal requirements (e.g. in terms of gaining citizenship) and that more general attitudes towards the state and society (e.g. in terms of language, culture and education) were accentuated as the most relevant to the integration process meaning that for the people in Estonia integration is more based on knowing the state language and attitudes towards the state.

Even though the themes of language, cultural Othering and education are still important dividing factors in perceived ethnic boundaries in Estonia, another important element emerged in the aftermath of the economic crisis. I argue in this chapter that the reconciliation between the pragmatic understanding of economic necessity and the more national emotional element is pertinent in understanding interethnic relations in Estonia a decade since joining the Western structures and forming part of the Estonian 'normality'. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 as well, the Estonian national self-esteem has been shifted more towards economic success and therefore 'swallowing' the nationalist feelings in light of this does not in fact undermine national pride, but rather demonstrates the moral high ground taken by Estonia. Also, the Russophone interview findings arguably suggest a generalised trend towards 'pragmatic adaptation' to new realities rather than voice of protest.

The final section of the chapter brings out how the respondents discussed the domestic political dimensions in Estonia. The expectations had been high for the rise of living standards in the years following EU accession in 2004, but the recovery from the economic crisis has been slower than expected in Estonia and has left an imprint how people frame the political scene both domestically and on the EU level. The glorification of the 1990s becomes a clear idealised benchmark again (as discussed in Chapter 5) for addressing the political actors in Estonia and unsurprisingly, a general disappointment with the politics in Estonia had taken root. The nostalgia for the more 'emotional' dramatic politics of the late 1980s and early 1990s, compared to the dull and routine 'normal' politics that followed was an interesting point to come from the analysis. However, as the chapter (and the thesis) demonstrates, the complex layers of national identity constructions in Estonia still provide interesting perspectives and explanatory grounds for understanding the political, economic and societal perceptions in Estonia *even* after becoming a 'normal' European country.

CHAPTER 8. 'RETURNED TO 'NORMALITY'?'

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This research is a qualitative in-depth investigation into Estonian national identity constructions after joining the European Union and NATO. This thesis sought to bring forward a complex multi-layered picture of Estonian identity that emerges with examining the perspective from below. The main argument advanced in this thesis is that a certain 'normality' compatible with the Estonian national identity constructions had settled nearly a decade after joining the EU when this research was conducted. This thesis claims that having gained accession to the European Union and NATO in 2004, Estonia formally validated its 'return in Europe', however, the way in which this belonging to Europe is conceptualised by the people living in Estonia can vary. At the risk of simplification, there appear to have been shifts in both the *temporal* and *spatial* narratives of 'normality' as put forward by Eglitis (2002). The main new prisms that discussions on Estonian national identity appear to run through are how the non-negotiable neoliberal paradigm, which, especially in the after-math of the economic crisis, had contributed to the emergence of a new North-South axis indicating an alteration in the *spatial* 'normality' for constructing 'Europe'; and having the idealised 1990s and the 'Second Estonian Republic' as a benchmark for national identity constructions, a clear *temporal* shift from the interwar period.

But why is it important to study these themes in the post-enlargement context? As a full EU member, Estonia has had the ability to shape conceptions of European values and 'customise' EU policies in a way that it did not before 2004 when it was a 'norm taker' rather than a 'norm maker'. Gaining a deeper understanding

of the particular perspectives it brings to bear is therefore essential to understanding the wider development of the EU and Europe as a whole.

Also, how relevant are the much-discussed East-West divisions nearly a decade after the 2004 enlargement despite the formal claim that a Europe 'whole and free' had come into being? Are there other possible ideational divisions that have become pertinent from the Estonian perspective? And what is Russia's continued role as the Other for the EU as a whole, not just for Estonia? Arguably 'normalisation' of relations with Russia was never going to imply that they were the same as those with Finland, Latvia or other nearby countries – it was more a case of Estonia Othering Russia in a more consistent way with some other European countries.

The economic crisis, which hit Europe in 2008, intensified the competition for defining the Europeanness to which Estonia was 'returning'. It has arguably encouraged a new binary of North/South division in how Europe was perceived, with Estonia seen by the people there as embodying the 'true' neoliberal values associated with the understanding of 'Europe'. The strident neoliberal paradigm has helped to shape other national identity constructions – this includes most notably understandings of the external significant negative Other, Russia, which in turn has framed the domestic interethnic relations to a degree. Along with this, themes of security have not lost their relevance in the highly complex national identity constructions and continued to shape Estonia's self-positioning in Europe and vis-à-vis Russia, even if a certain reconciliation between the pragmatic understanding of economic necessity and the more national emotional element appears to be pertinent nearly a decade after officially 'returning to Europe'. From a more present-day standpoint we can see how this crisis has put the EU under severe strain by fostering the rise of populist politics across a range of countries. In Estonia, the rise of the right-wing populism has been slower, although gaining more ground in recent years, and this thesis provides significant grounds for a better understanding of these developments in Estonia.

Additionally, and more importantly, since gathering the data for this research, one needs to keep in mind that there has been a significant shift in the 'normality' that had arguably settled in by 2013, with Russia invading Ukraine the following

year and altering the wider security perspective in Europe. Even though some politicians in Europe, including in Estonia, continued to make alarmist remarks about threat from Russia prior to 2014 (e.g. during and after the Georgian War in 2008), there appeared to be a general view that, while unpredictable, 'mysterious' and not on board with the vision of a 'New Europe', Russia was not about to mount any active challenge to Europe[16].

However, with hindsight, the EU in general was already sleepwalking its way into the confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. Russia's incursion into Ukraine in 2014 may have changed the paradigm, but official Estonia's attitude seems to be one of 'keep calm and carry on', and a direct attack on an EU and NATO member state by Russia is viewed as inconceivable. Rather, Russia is seen as a problem to Europe as a whole, not specifically to Estonia or the Baltics, and as threatening to European values. This demonstrates a considerable change compared to the 1990s and this research brings out the foundation for understanding how and why this is so.

The amount of academic research done on Estonian national identity has decreased since accession to the EU and NATO. Even more so, very few have explored this topic from a grassroots perspective. This research makes a significant contribution to understanding the 'normality' that had settled in Estonia (and Europe) within the decade of belonging to the EU and NATO. By taking a bottom-up view, it looks at the extent of feedback loop between official narratives and the grassroots perspectives. The former shape the latter, but the latter are also held by those who make policy. Thus, it is important to gain this deeper qualitative understanding of the discourses that exist within the society.

This concluding chapter will provide an overview of the thesis. It will first discuss the theoretical approach employed for this research and what it adds to the existing academic research. It then highlights one of the significant contributions this research makes to the field by discussing the bottom-up approach taken and the innovative visual methodology employed for conducting the interviews for this

[16] E.g. the UK Parliament House of Lords EU Sub-Committee on External Affairs (2015) report 'The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine'

study. The main section discusses the principal findings of this thesis before concluding with a look at possibilities for further research.

8.2 THE APPROACH FOR STUDYING ESTONIAN 'NORMALITY'

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical grounds for why and how 'normality' and national identity are approached and analysed in the study at hand. 'Normality' is broadly addressed as the common sense and taken for granted situations in the social world which usually don't get noticed by the people living it. 'Normality' can help us understand the frames in which people see and interpret their particular historical circumstances and what they find desirable about their society, limited by the cultural and structural context they inhabit.

The theoretical premise for understanding identity and groupness relies on Henry Hale's (2008) account of ethnicity, which he sees as being mainly about uncertainty reduction in a complex social world. Identity is defined as a set of points of reference which help categorise and navigate the world around us and groups are formed by having common relationships to points of reference. Pulling the broader theoretical discussion together, 'normality' is used in this research as an ideational collection of thicker points of reference related to perceptions of national identity which are useful for the people in Estonia for navigating and reducing uncertainty in the social, economic and political world.

The chapter then explains how national identity is approached in this study within the social constructivist paradigm. This study follows Benedict Anderson's (1983) famous definition of the nation as 'an imagined political community' and looks at national identity not as something fixed or in an essentialising sense, but rather as discursively produced and reproduced by means of language and constantly negotiated and renegotiated. The best way for comprehending these constructions of national identity is through studying the discursive fields from 'below as well as above'.

In the final section, the specific Estonian post-Soviet but pre-accession 'normality' central to narratives of Estonia's national identity is discussed through the works

of Eglitis (2002) and Rausing (2004). One of the core points of reference for 'normality' in Estonia was opposition to the 'abnormal' Soviet rule. 'Normality' was largely based on the idea of what Estonia would have been like had the Soviet occupation not taken place. The *spatial* – belonging to the Western world – and the *temporal* – glorification of the inter-war era of independence – became the pillars for identity construction for Estonia after regaining independence in 1991.

Joining the EU and NATO in 2004 has certainly had an impact on the dominant set of ideas which shape the policy-making process and Estonia's self-positioning within the international arena. The chapter explains how and why the concept of 'normality' provides a very useful framework for looking at national identity constructions in Estonia. It forms the basis for the main agenda for this research as to how the idea of becoming and being a 'normal' country again after regaining independence in 1991 has changed in the post-2004 context, which ostensibly signified becoming a 'normal' Western country again.

This research is guided by the bulk of previous academic literature on Estonian national identity constructions (Chapter 3). While the topic was especially prominent academically in the 1990s and has lost some of its appeal in the post-accession era, the significant contributions made by David J. Smith (2002, 2003, 2005, 2010), Richard Mole (2012), Maria Mälksoo (2006, 2009, 2010), Merje Kuus (2007, 2010, 2011), Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin (2009), Andres Kasekamp and Karsten Brüggemann (2009, Brüggemann 2007), Eva-Clarita Onken (2007, 2009, Pettai 2011), Vyacheslav Morozov (2003, 2005), Marko Lehti (2005, 2006, 2007, 2010), Pami Aalto (2003), Daina Stukuls Eglitis (2002) and others have been valuable in providing context and different perspectives on the Estonian national identity debates.

Chapter 3 starts by looking at some of the ethnographic research conducted on Estonian national identity in recent years and establishes the need for a further careful uncovering of how ordinary people think about various identity-related themes in the post-EU context.

In general, the chapter situates the current study in relation to existing work on the question of Estonian national identity and brings out the main themes running

through prior research on this topic. These themes provided the context for addressing the post-accession 'normality' in Estonia and guided the methods for conducting fieldwork for this study. The literature review discusses the main threads running through the *spatial* and *temporal* narratives in Estonian 'normality' in the pre-accession era and looks into some of the changes within these narratives through previous research.

These themes are broadly divided into three sections. First, a section is dedicated to discussing the role conflicting narratives of history with Russia and memory politics in general play in Estonia's identity and how it frames the policy-making. Second, it brings out the various Others of Estonia's identity-building process, since identity is always constructed in relation to Other. Here, the threatening qualities of Russia as the Other are drawn out through looking at previous research. On the other hand, this section also looks at how the perceptions of Europe and the European Union guide Estonia's self-positioning in the international sphere and how this in turn impacts upon people's perceptions of everyday life and through that 'normality' on a grassroots level. Third, the literature review brings out the variety of labels which have been attached to Estonia's self-definition, whether internally sought for or externally placed upon and the negotiation of these within the Estonian identity-building process. These include the regional identification labels such as Baltic or Nordic and temporal concepts such as new Europe. It also looks at the attempts to establish Estonia as the flexible, innovative and an economic success story within the new democracies of 1990s and expands the discussion on the unquestionable neoliberal agenda which has been part of a top-down discourse of 'normality' in Estonia. It further elaborates on the useful term of nationalist neoliberalism for understanding this paradigm in Estonia and helping frame the discussion around neoliberalism in the following empirical chapters.

The chapter establishes the three underlying themes framing Estonia's identity construction and shaping perceptions of 'normality' - the narrative of 'returning to Europe', constructions of Russia as the Other in Estonia's identity-building process and conflicting narratives of history. These main themes guided the preparations for data collection for this research.

Most existing studies on Estonia's identity-building process and its relation to Russia and history have focused on dominant discourses, media outlets, archives and survey results, with an emphasis on the role of the political elite. The need for examining the grassroots level in order to achieve a better understanding of national identity constructs has been emphasised in recent literature as well as the theoretical discussions surrounding nations and nationhood, and this research has drawn on this necessity to provide an empirically different perspective on how Estonian national identity is constructed on an everyday level and gain a more nuanced understanding of perceptions of 'normality'. Within this wider bottom-up approach, in the hopes to widen and deepen the empirical data further, I incorporated a more innovative approach to data gathering – namely I introduced images guided by the themes of Estonian national identity to the interviewing process.

8.3 STUDYING ESTONIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH IMAGES

While there is strong agreement among scholars that multiple layers of inter-community identities do exist, the use of ethnographic or ground-up methods, in order to receive a better understanding of the complexity of these identities, has hardly been utilised in the case of Estonia. This research took a bottom-up approach to analysing Estonia's current political and social situation, and through in-depth interviews offers a more detailed and nuanced insight into the life-worlds of the respondents and their constructions of Estonian 'normality'.

The interviews were not simply structured talk-based sessions, but I incorporated a novel aspect to them – namely I used images during the interviews in order to generate additional insight into the issues under investigation, relying on Gillian Rose's (2013) claim that things are discussed in the talk about visual materials that do not get discussed in talk-only interviews. Photo elicitation or image elicitation method proved successful and highly valuable for this research. It provided a way to decentre the narrative and offer the respondents a chance to discuss various aspects more on their own terms, even though certain limitations still remain within this context (e.g. perception of what is expected of them, the

choice of images). As mentioned, the range of images I introduced to the process were based on previous academic research into Estonian national identity and were chosen to reflect the dominant discourse on these topics in the Estonian media. These included:

- 'return to Europe'; and Europe as the positive Other;
- Russia as the negative Other;
- conflicting history narratives.

These themes formed the basis for selecting certain key events, persons, objects generally seen as associated with these themes and the formed the grounds for choosing images from the media and other sources in order to provide a stimulus for discussion.

I was looking for 'rich' data and possible different perspectives in Estonia and conducted 33 interviews with Estonian- and Russian-speakers in all over Estonia and some in Brussels between January 2013 and January 2014. Rather than aspiring to statistical generalisability or representativeness, the aim was to reflect the diversity within the Estonian population and draw out these perspectives arising from the discussions on themes of national identity.

Although, as with any research project, some issues emerged with conducting the fieldwork, the visual methodology proved to be very useful as it helped to open up internal worlds and interpretations of participants regarding issues that I might not have thought to probe, and from the more practical side, it facilitated asking questions and provided structure and focus for the interviews. This was especially useful during the interviews with Russian-speakers as explained in more depth in Chapter 4.

8.4 OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

8.4.1 ESTONIA IN EUROPE

The first of the three empirical chapters takes on the challenging task of exploring the internal essence of 'Europe' (5.2) and the EU (5.4) in Estonian national identity constructions a decade after Estonia had 'returned' to this entity. As discussed throughout the thesis, the 'return to Europe' narrative was in the 1990s embedded in the idea of achieving collective security, which emphasised Estonia's belonging to the European value structures already during the interwar period.

As the chapter demonstrates, the value dimension within the respondents' understandings of Europe is still prevalent, however, there appeared to be little critical reflections as to what these values actually are. This might be due to several interlinking factors that play a part in Estonian national identity constructions. The official validation of Estonia belonging to Europe, and therefore adhering to the 'European values', came in 2004 when Estonia formally joined the EU. Estonia was seen as already inherently embodying these values from the interwar years of independence and therefore there appeared little reason to critically reflect on what these might entail. Further to this, the 'abnormal' Soviet occupation years provided a ground for Othering 'normal' Europe in this construction and therefore Europe was defined rather in terms of what it is not than what it is. If Estonia had not been occupied by the Soviet Union, it would have been a 'normal' European state. The Soviet experience also provides another angle for perceptions of Europe or the West in general. The suffering narrative is implied in various pillars of identity construction and the years of suffering appear to contribute to the national self-esteem in the sense that Estonians understand best what it really means to be 'European' and have the toughness to carry it through. In this sense, the European identity becomes an extension of national identity, of the Self, to be customised according to one's own needs and understandings.

The neoliberal approach can be seen as the *leitmotif* running through from the 1990s to present-day and the economic crisis provided a strong continuation in Estonia for the understanding that following these principles in the only 'correct'

or ‘true’ way. The adherence to the ‘true’ European values in terms of adopting austerity measures has been a particularly important element also in the top-down construction of demonstrating Estonia’s European essence and was reflected on similarly by the respondents especially in comparison to the Southern European countries. A clear dividing line could be drawn in this regard between the Northern and Southern Europe (5.2.4) and through that establishing a new dimension for Estonia’s *spatial* ‘normality’. Even though the Northern or Nordic identity has played a significant role in Estonian identity-construction since the beginning of 1990s, the economic crisis brought about a new North-South axis in conceptually dividing Europe and provided a useful ‘Other’ in further consolidating Estonia’s Northern European identity aspect. This perspective was also interlinked with the already mentioned suffering narrative, which translated into taking pride in toughness and modesty during hard times.

As to the spatial boundaries of ‘Europe’ (5.3), these appeared to be mostly drawn according to perceived cultural differences. Not surprisingly the significant Others for ‘Europe’ in this regard were Russia and Turkey, who were largely not seen to embody the ‘European’ values. However, as to some former communist countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, some residual feelings of solidarity going back to the Soviet past could be detected in the responses for including them on the European mental map. In a sense, these countries were framed as ‘not quite Europe’, as Estonia had been before officially validating its place within it in 2004.

The second part of the chapter addressed how the respondents discussed belonging to the European Union more specifically as this was not necessarily conflated with the idea of Europe. While discussions surrounding Europe were based on values and cultural differences, the EU was addressed in terms of fixed rules and regulations applied by the structure. The EU regulations were counterpoised to the flexibility of the small Estonian state and common-sense attitude of the Estonians. The EU’s broad-brush policies without regard for the regional, cultural or most importantly, the economic differences between EU member states were depicted as unfair and a ‘threat’ to the traditional way of life. However, the respondents had to negotiate the various existing national identity constructions when discussing fulfilling the different criteria set by the EU. On the one hand, this ‘poster-boy’ image is used to highlight adherence to the

'true' European values and perceived as something to take pride in. On the other hand, a level of disgruntlement is evident when discussing some of the 'unreasonable' requirements set by the EU which Estonia's government fulfills to the letter in part to maintain this image and demonstrate its deep-rooted belonging to the EU structures and European values. The unconditional implementation of EU norms and directives has certainly come under criticism by the respondents after a decade of experience in the union.

The most significant element arising from these discussions was what I have termed in this thesis as the 'Second Estonian Republic' (5.4.1). The term is used to indicate a shift from drawing on the first, interwar period of independence of the Estonian Republic as a foundation for the present-day Estonian identity construction in terms of belonging to the EU, and instead the comparison, especially in economic terms, came from the period between regaining independence in 1991 and joining the EU and NATO in 2004. This new benchmark of temporal 'normality' can be attributed both to generational change, but also to inherently perceiving Estonia as a sovereign state, even if constrained at times by EU regulations, without the need to rely back on the narrative of state restoration. In this sense Estonia has achieved 'normality', 'returned to Europe'.

8.4.2 RUSSIA AS THE 'OTHER'

Following on from addressing Europe and EU in Estonian national identity construction, Chapter 6 moves to analysing Russia as the perennial Other in Estonia's national identity construction. While the 'return to Europe' by accession to the EU and NATO was supposed to officially validate Estonia as a 'normal' European country, this same integration to the West was seen as a necessary prelude to the full 'normalisation' of relations with Russia. In the 1990s this 'normalisation' was mostly seen through the prism of security in Estonia, which was arguably still relevant during the time the data was gathered for this research (2013), and which has attained whole new dimensions since 2014. However, as the chapter demonstrates, in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis and prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the emphasis in Othering Russia had

shifted to the more pragmatic aspects in line with the neoliberal paradigm discussed in Chapter 5.

As the first part of the chapter argues, the underlying securitisation of relations with Russia was still evident in 2013 in Estonian national identity constructions. The interview data revealed the various and at times conflated themes regarding continuous securitisation of Russia. First, the interwar period, the ensuing occupation, and the conflicting history narratives regarding the Second World War still formed a significant element in perceptions of Russia among the respondents (6.2.2). The interview data provided supporting evidence for the understanding that Russia's nostalgia for the Soviet Union and its expansionist interests had not disappeared with Estonia joining the EU and NATO.

Second, the expectation of 'normalising' relations with Russia in the 1990s did not materialise with accession to the Western structures and is in fact argued to have taken a more controversial turn as Estonia and other new member states felt more secure in expressing their true position. The research demonstrates that the threat emanating from Russia was still a valid concern for the Estonian-speaking respondents in 2013, even if diminished to a degree and a more 'cultural' way of Othering had become applicable.

The more traditional threat perception is interlinked with this cultural Othering on the EU/NATO sphere, where the respondents expressed concern over EU/NATO's ability to see Russia for its real intentions. This 'more Western than the West' construction of Estonia in terms of understanding Russia's intentions better than the older member states in these organisations builds on both the more traditional security dimension (threat perception) as well as Orientalising practices towards Russia as the 'chaotic' East (cultural Othering). In a word, Estonia has the experience to understand how truly unpredictable Russia is, and this needs to be taken on board more fully by the 'West'. Therefore the people in Estonia see themselves as having a truer understanding of and attachment to Western values than perhaps the 'West' and the need to defend them.

However, the constant process of 'normalising' relations can be seen as having formed a different 'normality' in relations with Russia. This means that the idea

of ‘normalising’ relations has been effective in shaping the wider national identity constructions in the post-accession period and not simply a foreign policy goal as set out in the 1990s. This different ‘normality’ in relations with Russia is in line with becoming a ‘normal’ European country, which implies that the security concerns have diminished, and Russia was Othered more in terms of European values than any specific threat Estonia might face as a country.

The ‘abnormality’ of Russia for its failure to ‘normalise’ relations was placed on the Russian political elite by the respondents which appeared to contrast the official discourse, which posits neo-imperialism as a basis for this ‘abnormality’. The Yeltsin era in the 1990s was seen as building a path towards ‘normalising’ relations, while Vladimir Putin coming to power was seen to have derailed this process of ‘normalisation’ and contributing to the opposite. Again though, one needs to keep in mind the pre-2014 context for these constructions and one could argue here that perhaps the perception of 1990s Russia with Yeltsin as the president has altered as well in today’s changed context.

The second part of the chapter discusses a more recent interesting development emerging from the interview data regarding Russia as the Other; namely framing the more pragmatic approach in strengthening economic ties with Russia within the wider national identity construction. The importance of the neoliberal paradigm in Estonian national identity construction comes through in shaping respondents’ understandings also in relations with Russia. The interviews revealed that relations with Russia were conceived in terms of the neoliberal economic narrative that had taken hold during the EU accession period and which is used to position Estonia within the framework of the enlarged EU. Having spent almost a decade in the EU and NATO in relatively calm times in terms of security, the chapter demonstrates that a certain ‘normalisation’ – different to that which had been articulated as a goal in the 1990s - had been achieved in relation to Russia and that pragmatic economic themes had become more relevant in people’s everyday perceptions. This perspective, especially in terms of diminished threat perception, has certainly changed after Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in Donbass, but at the time of conducting the interviews, in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis, the pragmatic issues appeared to have gained more relevance.

8.4.3 LIVING THE ESTONIAN 'NORMALITY'

While chapters 5 and 6 explored post-EU accession understandings of the Estonian Self from the standpoint of its relationship to two (distinct yet also inter-related) external Others - the positive and the negative, Europe/EU and Russia, Chapter 7 takes a look at how the people discussed everyday life in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of how people in Estonia perceive 'normality'. These more local relevant themes which emerged from the interview data are intertwined with the perception of Others discussed earlier but add value in terms of bringing out further complex points of reference for constructing 'normality' in post-accession Estonia. Chapter 7 first looks at themes of societal integration, a highly important political, economic and cultural issue in Estonia which can reveal a lot about the constructions of national identity and through that the perception of 'normality'. The chapter then discusses how larger goals or projects related to national identification and attempts at branding are framed by the respondents. It also brings to light how the respondents discussed the wider political landscape and certain prominent political actors in Estonia in order to help understand the perceptions of the internal to complement the external elements discussed in the previous empirical chapters.

As one might expect, the relevance of ethnic and ethno-linguistic boundaries has not disappeared in the Estonian society. In terms of societal integration, the interview data suggest that limited emphasis was placed upon the formal requirements (e.g. in terms of gaining citizenship) and that more general attitudes towards the state and society (e.g. in terms of language, culture and education) were accentuated as the most relevant to the integration process. These themes have been explored in depth through a variety of platforms and the fact that certain dividing lines were not seen to have disappeared among the ethno-linguistic groups is not a significant or novel finding in itself. An interesting element emerged in discussions surrounding understandings of cultural differences in relation to perceptions of what constitutes 'normal' Russian behaviour. These perceptions can be viewed as Othering not in terms of ethnicity *per se* but rather in terms of assigned belonging to a kind of 'underclass' – the ones who don't understand Estonian 'normality'.

However, even though themes of language, cultural Othering and education are still important dividing factors in perceived ethnic boundaries in Estonia, another important element emerged in the aftermath of the economic crisis. I argue in this chapter that the reconciliation between the pragmatic understanding of economic necessity and the more national emotional element is pertinent in understanding interethnic relations in Estonia a decade since joining the Western structures. The Estonian national self-esteem has been shifted towards economic success as explained throughout this thesis. This shift has become especially relevant in the immediate post-crisis era, and therefore taking a pragmatic line in relations internally or externally demonstrates a moral high ground taken rather than abandoning nationalist sentiment. This appeared to be uniting approach among the respondents as the Russophone interview findings arguably also suggested a generalised trend towards pragmatic adaptation to new realities rather than voice of protest. The post-crisis economic fatigue appears to have increased the importance of the neoliberal paradigm within Estonian national identity constructions and provided a consolidating element in the interethnic relations. Additionally, new boundaries such as urban-rural have become more salient in how political and economic aspects were discussed among the respondents.

The economic fatigue and disappointment associated with the high expectations for the rise of living standards in the years following EU accession in 2004, have also affected the way respondents framed the political landscape in Estonia. Again, as discussed in Chapter 5, the main finding within this dimension is that there appeared to be a clear glorification of the 1990s as an idealised benchmark for politics instead of the interwar period which has been highlighted in previous studies. The beginning of the 1990s can be seen to symbolise an idealistic virtuous era, when politics was zeal-based and engaged in for the common good rather than personal benefit. Certain nostalgia was detectable in how the respondents discussed the more 'emotional' dramatic and eventful politics of early 1990s, compared to the dull and routine 'normal' politics that has followed. The interplay of political and economic factors has had an effect on the general disillusionment with the political landscape and politicians in Estonia.

In conclusion, almost a decade within the EU, the security dimension of belonging to the EU had lost some of its relevance and economic themes had started to prevail. This can be explained with the recent economic crisis and relatively stable security situation within the area for some time. Since then, and with Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in Donbass area, there has been a shift in this perspective, but at the time of conducting the interviews, I would argue that the expected European 'normality' had settled in to a degree. The sense of firmly belonging to the value structures, and even surpassing the dwindling regard for 'true' values of Europe by Southern European countries, had become evident. As the thesis demonstrated, exploring the complex layers of national identity in Estonia is still important for gaining a more in-depth understanding of the political, economic and societal perceptions in Estonia even after having *returned* to 'normality'.

8.5 POSSIBILITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The main result of this research was to demonstrate that a certain European 'normality' had settled in the decade following accession to the EU and NATO. But a lot has changed since then. At the time of conducting the research, Russia had not invaded Ukraine which drastically changed the European security architecture, the migration crisis had not reached the EU, the rise of populist political movements in Europe was not yet flourishing with the rhetoric for dividing societies and breaking up the EU, there was no Brexit, the escalation of terrorist acts had not yet made an impact on people's everyday life in Europe, and the president of the USA was still Barack Obama.

The Lennart Meri International Conference held in Tallinn in 2016 was titled 'Shaping the New Normal' describing this new normality as the situation where international treaties were being blatantly violated; national borders changed by force once again; huge masses of people are on the move seeking refuge; national identities are being challenged, and extremist tendencies are flourishing, and in all this, it put forward the thought that the West has lost the initiative. This New Normal refers in itself to the idea that certain normality had been attained prior to 2014, and this is something that this thesis attempted to bring forward. However, this New Normal deserves further exploring and hopefully, some findings from this research will help to provide a baseline of a sort for comparison into the constructions of 'normal' in this new environment. While this thesis brings out significant and new elements in Estonian identity construction to consider, the changes that have occurred on the global level affect Estonia's self-narration in terms of Othering the positive Europe and the negative Russia, while the economic woes have not disappeared and provide a backdrop for how the various Others are negotiated on the ground.

In addition to that, perhaps a further angle to explore in order to deepen our understandings of the Estonian national identity constructions would be from the 'outside' as Estonia's national identity constructions are a mutual process with the various Others. Looking at how Estonia is seen from Europe, either from the official perspective or grassroots level, would provide further insights into Estonian national identity. Accordingly, looking at how Estonia is depicted in the

Russian narrative would allow for a deeper reflexion on the nature of constructing the negative Other.

APPENDIX A: Overview of the respondents

TALLINN

Linda was a 34-year-old woman. The interview was held in the beginning of January 2013 in Tallinn at her work place. She was a specialist working in the retail area. Linda was relatively modest and quiet at first but seemed to feel relaxed about sharing her opinions with me as the interview progressed.

Katrin was a 32-year-old woman. The interview was held in the beginning of January 2013 in Tallinn at her work place. She was working in marketing. Katrin was very confident in her opinions and appeared comfortable in sharing her thoughts and feelings about the topics discussed.

Greta was a 52-year-old woman. The interview was held in the beginning of January 2013 in Tallinn in an office at her place of work. She was a mid-level manager at a retail company. I knew her from earlier but did not have a personal relationship with her. She was very outspoken about her opinions, at times perhaps even trying to provoke me during the interview.

Aino was a 77-year old woman. The interview was held mid-January 2013 in Tallinn at her home. She was a retired former teacher and related a lot of her answers back to her experiences through the years in that profession. She appeared to enjoy discussing various issues surrounding the images and other topics arising from them.

Leeni was a 73-year-old woman. The interview was held mid-January 2013 in Tallinn at her home. She was a retired former teacher. She was relaxed, talkative and related a lot of the discussion back to her personal experiences.

Raul was a 22-year-old man. The interview was held in late January in Tallinn at his work place. He was working as an IT support specialist at an educational organisation. The interview was held in a public area but there were very few disturbances and he did not appear to have any issues about conveying his opinions. He said he was an apolitical person and did not read the news. He had heard of certain events and people in the images and had relatively general opinions about the topics discussed during the interviews.

Toomas was a 39-year-old man from a mixed family (Russian-Estonian) background. The interview was held in late January 2013 at a private residence in the outskirts of Tallinn in a quiet setting. He had an applied education degree and did various construction jobs. He appeared somewhat sceptical at first about what was expected of him during the interview and inquired thoroughly after the interview about how what he considered a broad discussion around the images would be qualified as research. The interview was held in Estonian. He had attended both Estonian and Russian schools and had near-native level Estonian

skills. However, it appeared to me that he might have been slightly careful at times in discussing the interethnic relations in Estonia, but not to an extent that he would have refrained from giving his opinions (perhaps just choosing the wording at times).

Piret was a 37-year-old woman. The interview was held in the middle of February 2013 in Tallinn at her work place. She was working in a retail distributing unit, but the interview was held in a separated area in a quiet setting. She appeared open and comfortable during the interview and offered to start talking about the images before I even started to introduce what I've placed on the table.

Pille-Riin was a 48-year-old woman. The interview was held in Tallinn in the middle of February 2013. She was from a smaller town in Estonia but had lived in Tallinn for most of her life. She was working in a retail distributing unit. She was very friendly, perhaps at times modest about her opinions, but became more relaxed as the interview went on.

Priit was a 49-year-old man. The interview was held in Tallinn in the middle of February 2013. Priit worked as a driver in Tallinn. The setting for the interview was a private quiet area and he was reactive to the themes brought to the table and appeared to feel relatively comfortable sharing his opinions with me.

Anna was a 65-year-old woman from a mixed family (Russian-Estonian). The interview was held in Tallinn in late February 2013 in Estonian. Anna spoke native Estonian. She was working as a secretary. She was very friendly and talkative and was keen to discuss the images as soon as I laid them out on the table. The interview took place at her work place in a quiet area. I did not sense any hesitation regarding any topics that we discussed during the interviews and she appeared to be open about sharing her opinions.

Tarmo was a 27-year-old man. The interview was held in Tallinn at the end of February 2013. Tarmo was a specialist working for a government institution. Coming from a smaller place in Southern Estonia, he had been living in Tallinn for four years at the time. He expressed his opinions and personal experiences related to the images openly and appeared comfortable during the interview. The interview was held in a quiet setting in his place of work.

Aleksey was a 52-year-old man. He was of Ukrainian decent and we conducted the interview in Russian. He had been living in Tallinn most of his life. The interview took place in December 2013 in an office in Tallinn city centre. He was very articulate and did not appear to have any issues discussing any topic placed in front of him. Aleksey was very interested in my research and continued asking questions about it after we finished the interview.

Elena was a 65-year-old woman from a Russian-speaking family in Tallinn. She had good Estonian skills and even though I expected the interview to take place in Russian, she offered to hold it in Estonian. The interview took place in the beginning of January 2014 in Tallinn in a more public area in her office building.

She was working in the private sector in Estonia and appeared to have no problem providing thoughts and opinions on the images and follow-up questions.

NARVA

Maria was a young woman in Narva. Her case is described in more detail in the discussion section here as the interview with her was the one that did not work at all. Maria was an administrator and the interview took place privately at her place of work in the beginning of May 2013. The interview was held in Russian. She appeared nervous and uneasy during the interview, had prepared short 'formal' answers prior to the interview and was reluctant to provide any answers to the follow-up questions. The interview lasted only 15 minutes and gave more data for this research regarding the process than the substance of the interview.

Nadya was a woman in Narva with a 17-year-old daughter. The interview took place in the beginning of May 2013 in a quiet area at her place of work and was held in Russian. Nadya worked as a mid-level manager in a shop. She generally seemed open about discussing various topics but was slightly cautious in discussing political matters.

Dimitry was a 27-year-old man in Narva. The interview was held in a quiet area in his place of work in the beginning of May 2013 and was held in Russian. Dimitry worked in a shop in a shopping centre in Narva. He seemed open and talkative about the images placed in front of him.

Nina was a 20-year-old woman in Narva. The interview was held in a quiet area in her place of work in the beginning of May 2013 and was held in Russian. She was working in a shop there. She did not appear reluctant to touch on any topic placed on the table.

Yulia was a mother of two young children. She was from Narva but had studied at an Estonian university and spoke very good Estonian. The interview was held at a children's playground in Narva in the beginning of May 2013 in Estonian. She was actively involved in local issues and very well-informed in various political matters in Estonia. Yulia had clearly formulated opinions on most matters discussed and I did not sense any reluctance in her sharing these thoughts.

CENTRAL ESTONIA

Kaili was a 70-year-old pensioner from a small settlement in Central Estonia. The interview took place mid-May 2013. She was involved in local activities and the interview took place in a small community centre where she was doing some voluntary work, but at the time it was empty, so the setting for the interview was quiet. Kaili appeared pleased to share her opinions and relate the images and other arising topics to personal experiences.

Tõnu was a 57-year-old man from a town in Central Estonia. The interview took place in mid-May in his office. He was working for the local government there. Tõnu was involved in politics and appeared happy to share his opinions on various political matters and relate different topics that came up to local issues.

SOUTHERN ESTONIA

Siret was a 22-year-old woman from a small settlement in Southern Estonia. The interview took place in mid-August 2013. At the time she was studying in a larger town but was home for the summer. The first part of the interview took place outdoors, but due to rain, we moved the interview to a car. She took part in various local activities and was generally open and talkative about various issues that emerged during the interviews.

Epp was a 46-year-old woman from a small settlement in Southern Estonia. She was working in the agricultural sector there. She was very friendly and open about her opinions and the interview process went very smoothly. Since she was in the middle of a busy day, then the interview was perhaps slightly rushed. The interview took place in mid-August 2013.

SETOMAA

Laila was a 55-year-old woman from Setomaa. The interview took place there at her place of work in late August 2013. She was working for a local state organisation at the time and we were able to use her office for the interview. Laila was at first hesitant about what she could possibly have to add for my research project but agreed to do an interview after I explained the project to her in more depth. During the interview she no longer appeared to have any issues with giving her opinions on the images and other emerging themes. As with other people from more rural parts of Estonia, many of the topics that surfaced during the interview were related back to local matters.

Martin was a 69-year of man from Setomaa. He was a teacher there and the interview took place in a school during summer holidays. The interview was held in late August 2013. Martin was also active in various community activities. As with several other respondents, I had to explain the research project and the purpose of the interview in more depth for him to feel comfortable starting a discussion on these topics. He was slightly reluctant to share personal opinions at first, but mainly because he appeared to think of those as irrelevant for my research and became much more inclined to talk about various things as the interview progressed.

ISLANDS

Signe was a 70-year-old woman from Muhu island. She was working as a teacher and the interview was held in one of the classrooms there in late August (2013), when school had not started yet. She had an immediate reaction to one of the images and the interview went in smooth manner. Signe expressed her thoughts and opinions clearly and appeared to feel comfortable with me during the discussion.

Merike was a 49-year-old woman from Muhu island. Muhu island community is small and in order to keep the anonymity of the respondent, it is not possible to disclose her profession or the location of the interview. Merike appeared slightly modest about expressing her opinions on various topics and kept the answers on a relatively general level. It appeared to me that she seemed to consider her personal experiences and opinions irrelevant and I had to take more initiative in asking follow-up questions during the interview.

BRUSSELS

Tiina was a 37-year-old woman. She had been working in the public sector in Estonia for quite a few years and was an Estonian official in Brussels at the time. The interview was held in her office there in mid-July 2013. The interview started off in a more official manner, with her responses to the images or questions being more of official nature, but the discussion moved on to include also personal experiences and sentiments.

Eveli was a 48-year-old woman. She had worked several years in the public sector in Estonia and was an Estonian official in Brussels at the time. The interview was held mid-July 2013 in her office there. Her answers reflected that she had given some thought to the issues discussed during the interview, but this was not necessarily due to her position in Brussels. It seemed to me that Eveli was simply generally more engaged in public matters. She also included quite a few personal experiences during the interview.

Mart was a 50-year-old man working in the EU structures in Brussels. The interview was held in an outdoor quiet café outside his place of work. His answers were more of personal nature and the fact that he had been living in Brussels for quite a few years appeared to make little difference apart from occasional comparisons to the living situation in Brussels.

Kaidi was a 41-year-old woman working in Brussels on a more permanent basis. The interview was held in her office. She visited Estonia quite regularly and approached the interview from a personal perspective, relating answers back to when she was still Estonia or things she had ‘heard’ were happening there.

Riina was a 33-year-old woman working in Brussels. She had not been based there for too long but had prior experience in the government sector in Estonia. The

interview took place mid-July 2013 on the roof of her office building. She appeared very well-informed in general about various political issues and managed to reflect on them in depth, but this was again not necessarily due to her position in Brussels.

Birgit was a 35-year-old woman working as an official in Brussels for the past five years already. The interview was held mid-July 2013 in her office. She appeared somewhat uneasy about discussing the interview topics, almost apologising for providing personal opinions at times.

APPENDIX B: Information sheet for the respondents

Information Sheet

Constructing 'normality' in a wider Europe: the case of Estonia

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Please read and consider the following information about the study carefully and do not hesitate to ask for clarification should anything remain unclear.

About the study

My name is Kerstin Mahlapuu and I am a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, the subject area of Central and East European Studies. I am currently conducting fieldwork for my PhD thesis. My research looks into how Estonian people perceive the current Estonian political and social situation. The purpose of this study is to develop a perspective into what is considered 'normal' in present-day Estonia, and to build an in-depth understanding of how the societal, political and economic aspects in Estonia are perceived by its inhabitants.

What does taking part in the study involve?

As part of the research, I am hoping to interview Estonians and Russian-speakers living in Estonia. If you agree to take part in the study you will be asked to participate in one interview conducted in your native language lasting about an hour and a half. The interview will be conducted face-to-face at a mutually convenient location. I am interested in talking with you about: the political and social situation in Estonia prior to the 1990s; the changes that took place during the 1990s; with the main focus on the period after Estonia joined the EU and NATO in 2004.
With your permission I would like to tape record the interview. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to, and you may stop the interview at any time.

What will happen to your answers?

The requirements of the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act will be observed. All your comments will be anonymised and you will not be identified in the final research report. Only I will have access to raw data arising from the research and this will be stored securely within a locked cabinet. All computer-held data will be password-protected. All information collected will also be treated confidentially, unless you reveal details of harm towards yourself or that you are causing harm to others. If this occurs, ethical guidelines will be followed which involves contacting relevant bodies to enable help and advice to be given.

If you have questions about the research you can contact me at the details below:

Kerstin Mahlapuu (MRes)
PhD student in Russian, Central and East European Studies
Central and East European Studies
School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Glasgow
Email: k.mahlapuu.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Supervisor:
Professor David Smith
Central and East European Studies
8 Lilybank Gardens
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8RZ
Email: David.Smith@glasgow.ac.uk

College Ethics Officer:
Dr Valentina Bold
School of Interdisciplinary Studies
Rutherford/McCowan Building
Dumfries Campus
University of Glasgow
Email: Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Project: Constructing 'normality' in a wider Europe: the case of Estonia

Name of Researcher: Kerstin Mahlapuu

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet provided for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree/do not agree to the interview being digitally recorded.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

APPENDIX D: Confidentiality agreement for the transcribers

Confidentiality agreement

Title of project: Constructing Estonian identity in a wider Europe

Name of Researcher: Kerstin Mahlapuu

Name of Transcriber:

I hereby confirm that:

2. I will use the audio files sent to me by the researcher only for the purpose of producing transcriptions;
5. I will assure the safety of the data and will be the only person who has access to it;
6. I will permanently delete the data from all data carriers and e-mail accounts after completing the transcriptions and forwarding them to the researcher.

Transcriber	Date	Signature

Researcher	Date	Signature

APPENDIX E: Example of the data analysis process in NVivo

The following provides an indication of some of the main nodal (thematic) points emerging from the data sets. The original data were in a combination of Estonian and Russian and the references below have been translated into English for display here. Yellow = main nodal point; Green = secondary nodal point(s). Following this initial coding period, the emergent themes were then placed within wider analytical frames.

Nodes
Regaining independence (90s)
History – politics of memory
Monuments
Branding
IT
Tallinn
Estonia in the EU and NATO
Eurozone
Enlargement (immigration)
Economy (Greece)
Present-day perspectives
'Estonia'
Estonian politicians (perceptions of politics)
Estonian politics (disappointment)
Estonian politics and politicians (personal contacts)
'Estonians'
Protest; self-interest
Economy – everyday perspectives
Emigration
Estonia as Nordic
Regional belonging in Europe (regional identity)
Culture (cultural identity)
Claims regarding gender and age
„Good old Estonian times"
Relations with Russian-speakers and vice versa
Bronze Night
Russia; relations with Russia

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